

# #TourismPostCOVID19 LOCKDOWN TOURISTIFICATION

ERNEST CAÑADA & IVAN MURRAY (ED.)

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## INTRODUCTION

Ernest Cañada & Ivan Murray<sup>1</sup>

In March 2020, we became clearly aware of the seriousness of the situation caused by COVID-19 when the state of alarm was declared in Spain, with the consequent home confinement of millions of people. The generalization around the world of this type of measures to restrict our daily behavior for health reasons confirmed that the threat was global and that, we were finally facing a pandemic in the way that Mike Davis (2020) had warned. Far from being accidental, it was closely associated with the historical evolution of capitalism. Inevitably we warned that the nature of this crisis, and the actions taken to stop the spread of the coronavirus, reproduced what humanity has done in the past to deal these types of threats: isolation as the mean of protection. This resulted in a sudden halt to mobility and a sharp reduction of human interactions that called into question the dominant tourism development model. In addition, in the previous months to the pandemic there had been two episodes that, due to their proximity in time, and seen from Spain, alerted us that this kind of tourism development could collapse and lead us to a disaster situation.

In September 2019, the announcement of the bankruptcy of the historic tour operator Thomas Cook put at risk the continuity of the massive arrival of tourists that could be catastrophic for those economies highly dependent on tourism. On the other hand, in January 2020, the storm Gloria had severe effects on the Spanish Mediterranean coasts. Then, in addition to the destruction of coastal infrastructures and the blurring of the coastline, we were also strongly impacted by the image of supermarkets in Mallorca with empty shelves. Food could not be transferred from the Peninsula, neither supplied locally due to the long abandonment of agriculture to the detriment of tourism and construction. These three elements concentrated in a very short span - business failure, worsening of the effects of natural phenomena

<sup>1</sup> Ernest Cañada is coordinator of Alba Sud. Ivan Murray is lecturer of Geography at the University of the Balearic Islands and collaborator of Alba Sud.

due to climate change and health crisis - illustrate the extreme vulnerability of those societies highly dependent on tourism.

Precisely, and in a premonitory way, Joan Moranta, titular scientist of the Balearic Oceanographic Centre, sent us an article that we published immediately on March 11 in which he warned on this conjunction of factors that could lead to a crisis of greater proportions. He pointed out that those societies under the dynamics of global tourism were highly vulnerable. And this had accelerated in the last decade. In addition, from the experience of previous crises, we knew well that, in a context of high inequality like ours, the crisis would fundamentally affect the most disadvantaged sectors of society, and that it would clearly have a marked class, gender and race bias. The risk of a greater precariousness of millions of people's lives in touristified societies triggered our alarms. We decided to take a step forward to face the anguish isolation.

With the state of alarm declared, from Alba Sud, as an independent research center specialized in tourism from critical perspectives, we analyzed how we should react to this situation. The practical paralysis of tourism made it evident that we could not continue with our research plans and publications, and we also felt the responsibility to intervene politically in the face of what was happening. We became aware of the need to provide analysis and perspectives in the face of the gravity of the moment and, above all, provide analytical tools to cope with what was falling on us. We thought that it was necessary to build a collective vision from Spain and Latin America, where our team is located. The identification of the main risks would help us in thinking how to influence politically in the face of the gravity of the moment. It was then when we decided, in addition to postponing our publication plan, to get to work from different perspectives to decode the changes that were rapidly taking place around tourism. This coincided with the consolidation process of a group of young people in the Alba Sud team who, with extraordinary maturity, became aware of the role we wanted to assume. In addition, we appealed to different researchers with whom we already had a relationship to join this collective effort to think about the present moment. To do this, we put three big questions on the table about tourism's dynamics and their relationship with the pandemic: How did we get to this situation? What was actually happening? What to do now? The response was immediate and generous. There were many people who wanted to leave the comfort zones that past certainties provide and venture to think politically about the most

serious crisis that tourism has experienced since the beginning of its contemporary expansion that began after the end of the Second World War. It was not at all an exercise in futurology or naive *goodism*, which emphasizes the opportunities for transformation as a mere wish without taking into account the structures and dynamics of capitalism, but rather an awareness of the gravity of the moment we were living and a willingness to contribute to a collective analysis that connects with the concerns of the subaltern classes and of a planet that we lose at times.

This book, which we publish one year after the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 9, 2020, reproduces the effort of the Alba Sud team, expanded and reinforced with renowned researchers who wanted to join this initiative. Most of the texts collected in the book were published online during the 2020 spring lockdown. We have organized the book into four parts. In the first, **“In perspective”**, Ivan Murray, lecturer of geography at the University of the Balearic Islands and collaborator of Alba Sud, and Ernest Cañada, coordinator of Alba Sud, as promoters of this process and editors of the same book, analyze in an unpublished text what this year of pandemic has meant for tourism, with the relative distance that allows us to write from the present moment and put the events that have taken place throughout the year in perspective. In this text we review how the global financial crisis of 2008 gave rise, in one of the fixes to capitalism, to an acceleration of the planetary touristification process; the way in which the COVID-19 pandemic has caused an interruption of this model of accumulation and reproduction of capital; the transformations that tourism business structures have undergone, with special attention to airlines and accommodation; its effects on work and, finally, the disputes over the public policy orientations with which it is proposed to deal the tourism crisis.

In the following parts of the book we reproduce practically without modifications the different articles that we have published on our website over the last few months. For this reason, we also expressly leave the usual hypertext links of the web articles to be read on the screen. Each of them includes a reference to the date when it was published. In the second part of the book, **“How have we got here?”**, we collect six articles that attempt to explain the different processes that have caused the current situation of vulnerability associated with tourism. This text will provide us a historical perspective to understand the current situation. In addition to the aforementioned article by Joan Moranta, written from Mallorca, the rest of the texts explore differ-



ent edges of the nexus tourism-vulnerability from a historical perspective. Antonio Aledo, Guadalupe Ortiz, Pablo Aznar-Crespo, José Javier Mañas, Iker Jimeno and Emilio Climent-Gil, lecturers and researchers from the Department of Sociology I at the University of Alicante, analyse the vulnerability of territories that have grounded their development on residential tourism, like the Costa Blanca in Spain. Alberto Acosta, Ecuadorian economist, former Minister of Energy and Mines, former president of the Constituent Assembly and former presidential candidate, questions the role that tourism has played in the extractivist logics of capitalism. Ángela Teberga, lecturer at the Federal University of Tocantins in Brazil, coordinator of the Labor Movens Research Group and collaborator of Alba Sud, exposes how the very high health risks of the cruise sector were already known. Those risks were confirmed by the current pandemic. And she highlights how little or nothing was done to prevent them. Érica Schenkel, lecturer at the National University of the South (UNS) in Bahía Blanca, Argentina, researcher at the National Council for Scientific and Technical Research (CONICET) of Argentina and collaborator of Alba Sud, dissects Latin American tourism public policies to illustrate how they built a model highly dependent on the international market. In relation to this, the vast majority can hardly access to tourism in their own countries, which in the end have worsened the current crisis situation. Finally, Ivan Murray and Ernest Cañada, in an article written between Mallorca and Barcelona respectively, responded to criticisms and mockeries of racist overtones made from Northern Europe at the beginning of the pandemic to explain the greater incidence of COVID-19 infections in countries such as Spain or Italy. To do so, they deployed a political economy analysis clarifying the structural causes that would have limited those countries response capacity, beyond the problems of political management, which also occurred.

The third part of the book, **“What’s going on”**, contains twelve texts, representing the bulk of our effort. In this part we compile the articles that we were writing to take the pulse of the changes that were happening. Rafael Borràs, a former Mallorcan trade unionist, analyst in the socio-labor sphere and collaborator of Alba Sud, was updating at different times on our website the analysis of the effects on tourism employment caused by the crisis in Spain. The text we now publish is the latest unpublished version of these concerns. Ángela Teberga, in a new text within the series of articles she published in recent months on the ravages of the pandemic on cruise ships, gives an account of the disastrous, irresponsible and greedy management that

cruise companies had with their crew in the first months of the crisis, leaving thousands of defenceless people unable to return to their homes. Agustín Cocola-Gant, researcher at the Center for Geographical Studies of the University of Lisbon, investigates the behaviour of short-term rental platforms and for what reasons, despite the decline in tourism, the transition of those homes to the residential market is being so reduced. Ismael Irigoy, postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Geography of the University of Santiago de Compostela and Department of Economic and Social Geography of the University of Uppsala, reports on the growing role of financial capital in hotel companies. For his part, José Mansilla, member of the Observatory on the Anthropology of Urban Conflict (OACU) in Barcelona, points out the possible changes that can be detected in cities that, due to the reduction in tourism, would be strongly affected. Joaquín Valdivielso, associate professor of moral and political philosophy at the University of the Balearic Islands, and Jaume Adrover, organic farmer and member of the environmentalist group Terraferida, from Mallorca, emphasize the loss of democratic quality associated with touristification processes. Democratic quality has worsened with the current crisis, in which tourism capital has redoubled its pressure to tailor public policies to its needs. Next, two chapters provide evidence and explain how the current crisis has a greater incidence among women who work in tourism, which has to do with previously existing structural inequalities for gender reasons. On the one hand, Núria Abellan, Carla Izcara and Marta Salvador, Alba Sud collaborators from Barcelona, presented these different expressions of gender inequality.

The third part of book ends with four pieces focused on different parts of Latin America, where the pandemic has affected even under conditions of greater social inequality. Cristina Oemichen, researcher at the Institute of Anthropological Research (IIA) of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), and Concepción Escalona Hernández, researcher at the Caribe University (Unicaribe), examine the situation of hotel workers in Cancun, Mexico. They show how low wages and limited saving capacity, greatly restricted the capacities of working families to maintain lockdown since they were forced to seek income, exposing themselves to greater health risks. Bianca Paes G. dos Santos, a Labor Movens collaborator, in Brazil, reveals the situation of tour guides, who were practically helpless in the face of the drop in tourism, due to the very nature of the way they provide services, and she introduces some of their efforts to organize and draw attention on their situation.

Arturo Silva Lucas, collaborator of Alba Sud in Costa Rica, examines the effects of the pandemic in a country that made tourism a strategic bet, and the different pressures from the business sector to obtain favourable treatment at this juncture. This part of the book ends with an article by Angélica Duarte, a collaborator from Mexico, in which she reviews the characteristics of the hegemonic tourism model in Central America, the policies that have sustained it, its current crisis and the demands for reactivation policies articulated between governments and private sector.

The fourth and last part of the book, **“So, what we do”**, collects contributions proposing ways to transform tourism. Daniel Hiernaux-Nicolas, professor at the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences of the Autonomous University of Querétaro, Mexico, warns of the impossibility of continuing with the current tourism development model and the need for a change of course that allows a transformation from its fundamentals. For her part, Cati Torres, associate professor of economics at the University of the Balearic Islands, questions the ecological viability of the current tourism model and, therefore, sees in its current crisis a chance to press for its transformation. Raoul Valerio Bianchi, professor at the University of East London in England, in a defense of the political economy of Marxist tradition, warns of the need to better understand the structure and functioning of capital linked to tourism in the context of current capitalist dynamics to sustain transformation proposals. Robert Fletcher, associate professor in the Department of Social Sciences at the University of Wageningen, the Netherlands, Macià Blázquez, professor of geography at the University of the Balearic Islands, Asunción Blanco, associate professor of geography at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, and Ivan Murray himself, in a text written between Amsterdam, Mallorca and Barcelona, they make a commitment to degrowth as a paradigm from which to think about the need for an urgent change in highly touristified societies. Along the same lines, Margalida Ramis, spokesperson for the Mallorcan environmental group GOB, defends the need for a socio-ecological transition that allows places strongly dependent on tourism to reduce their vulnerability, while expanding alternative activities. Within the frame of the proposals, from Argentina, Rodrigo Fernández Miranda and Verónica Dzienielsky, lecturers and researchers at the Center for Social Economy Studies of the National University of Tres de Febrero, being Rodrigo a collaborator of Alba Sud, propose the construction of alternatives as a field in dispute, in which the Social and Solidarity Economy could play a key role that must be articulated and strengthened.

The book closes with an open letter from the international NGO platform Transforming Tourism Initiative, of which Alba Sud has been a member since its foundation in Berlin in 2017, dated September 27, 2019, coinciding with the International Tourism Day, and addressed to Zurab Pololikashvili, Secretary General of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). It questioned the assumptions of a reactivation of tourism at all costs and defended the need for a transformation in a more equitable, sustainable and inclusive way, as well as the need to take into account other voices in the design of guidelines for tourism public policies. The letter did not receive greater consideration, but we want to recover it in this book, just as we published it on our website in its day, as a sign of a broad consensus built among very different voices of civil society from Europe, Asia, Latin America and Africa. A collective that defends the need for a change of direction in tourism and alerts that the current crisis cannot be resolved with more business pressure to socialize losses and privatize profits in a demand for reactivation that would leave societies in a situation of greater vulnerability.

In this selection of emergency texts, we purposely left out all those that addressed the discussion and possibilities of transformation of tourism from proximity. In those months we also started a reflection and analysis on tourism based on local domestic markets, which were practically the only ones that could be sustained in that period. Traditionally despised, proximity tourism has received enormous attention in recent months, and this has led to a dispute over multiple and contradictory public policies, objectives and practices. We leave the various texts that we publish on the web of Alba Sud, which were prepared in parallel to the previous areas of concern, because they will be published soon on a specific book edited by Ernest Cañada and Carla Izcara, *Proximity Tourisms, a plural in dispute*.

The COVID-19 pandemic has put into question the global touristification model that spread during the last decade, and which was one of the fixes that capitalism found to get out of the contradiction it entered with the global financial crisis of 2008. This period of tourism capital expansion has had dire consequences of various kinds and, above all, has accentuated inequalities. However, the way in which the tourism system could implode and the transformations that are imposed will hardly lead to more equitable societies. We are on the verge of the de-structuring of a social order in the tourism field that will cause a major social disaster and that the most disadvantaged classes are already paying. The transformation of tourism

is not the product of a supposed opportunity that would come by magic, it implies organization, political will to go in a certain direction and assume the social conflict that involves trying to put limits on the thirst of capital and its infinite reproduction needs. This book is also a commitment to think about tourism transformation from emancipatory perspectives.

Barcelona and Palma, February 15, 2021.

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# IN PERSPECTIVE

## LOCKDOWN TOURISTIFICATION

Ivan Murray & Ernest Cañada<sup>2</sup>

In the last few years, we have witnessed several episodes that have put tourism activity at risk in different touristic territories on a global scale. It is worth mentioning those that were caused by natural phenomena and exacerbated by the climate emergency, such as the destruction of Cancun by hurricanes *Gilberto* in 1988 and *Wilma* in 2005, or the bladderwrack crisis that affected the entire Mexican Caribbean in 2019. Armed conflicts such as those that shook Libya, Tunisia or Egypt, deeply affected their tourism industry. Also, terrorist actions in some global cities, such as Paris, New York, or Barcelona, temporarily reduced tourist arrivals. Even previous health crises have had a strong impact, as in the case of the H1N1 flu in Cancun between 2009 and 2010. But the current COVID-19 crisis has a global impact on tourism like no other. This also means that getting out of this situation may be especially costly. The risk of the current situation is obvious: the accentuation of vulnerability due to an accelerated touristification during the last decade. But how did this process start? How does the current crisis connect with the way global capitalism emerged from the global financial crisis that began in 2008? How does the pandemic affect tourism and how to deal with it? What processes of transformation in the tourism industry seem to be emerging now? What scenarios are opening for a sector that has been deeply affected by the current crisis? What public policies seem to have been implemented and in whose interest? What should we do from emancipatory perspectives in the current situation?

### The way out of the 2008 crisis, a prelude to the current situation

In the summer of 2007, when global capitalism seemed to be running out of control, the news about large U.S. banking and financial groups imploding broke out. The global financial and real estate bubble was beginning to burst. The official account was built around two axes: on the one hand, the classic blaming of the poor,

<sup>2</sup> Ivan Murray is lecturer of Geography at the University of the Balearic Islands and collaborator of Alba Sud. Ernest Cañada is coordinator of Alba Sud.



in this case, it was said that they lived beyond their possibilities by “irresponsibly” mortgaging themselves -it was even defined as the NINJA crisis, *No Income, No Job, No Assets*-; and on the other hand, greed and financial speculation. However, from counter-hegemonic approaches, the structural conditions that were articulated behind the Great Crisis have pointed out some time ago (Fernández-Durán, 2006; Subasat, 2016).

When the giant **Lehman Brothers** collapsed in the fall of 2008, the crisis took on a global dimension. Until then, many analysts had considered the situation in exclusively American terms. With the rapid contagion of the entire global financial system, what was described as one of the greatest crises of capitalism since the Great Depression of 1929, exploded. The political response to the global financial crisis was fundamentally articulated around: a public bailout of financial institutions; monetary expansion (QE - *Quantitative Easing*); increase in global debt, reduction of interest rates; and bank regulation-restructuring (Murray, 2020). The solution or arrangement of the crisis translated into an expansion and reinforcement of financial capital (Méndez, 2018); the adoption of austerity policies, particularly in the spaces of advanced capitalism most affected by the crisis, such as Greece and Spain, where private debt became public debt (Lapavistas and Fkassbeck, 2015); rise of the so-called BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) as a spatial arrangement to the crisis, associated with the commodities boom and the Chinese program of public investment in infrastructure and urban expansion (Bond and Garcia, 2015; Harvey, 2020). In response to the outbreak of the crisis and class politics, a powerful protest was also triggered in different parts of the planet. However, as magnate **Warren Buffett** warned: “there’s been class warfare going on for the last 20 years, and my class [the super-rich] has won”.

Hence, **the solution to the crisis endowed financial capital with greater power**. Consequently, the global corporate-financial map reflected a growing trend towards concentration, highlighting the role of mega-investment funds such as **BlackRock** or **Vanguard** which, together with the so-called sovereign funds, are the true masters of world capital. While the first ones benefited from US monetary policy -particularly monetary expansion-, the second ones benefited from the commodities boom (Haberly and Wójcik, 2017). As an example, the large Spanish IBEX-35 companies experienced a radical turnaround after the 2008 crisis, where these mega-funds have become major shareholders (Juste, 2017). The fact that the IBEX35 is in the control of these funds has had profound consequences on the entire social body through the



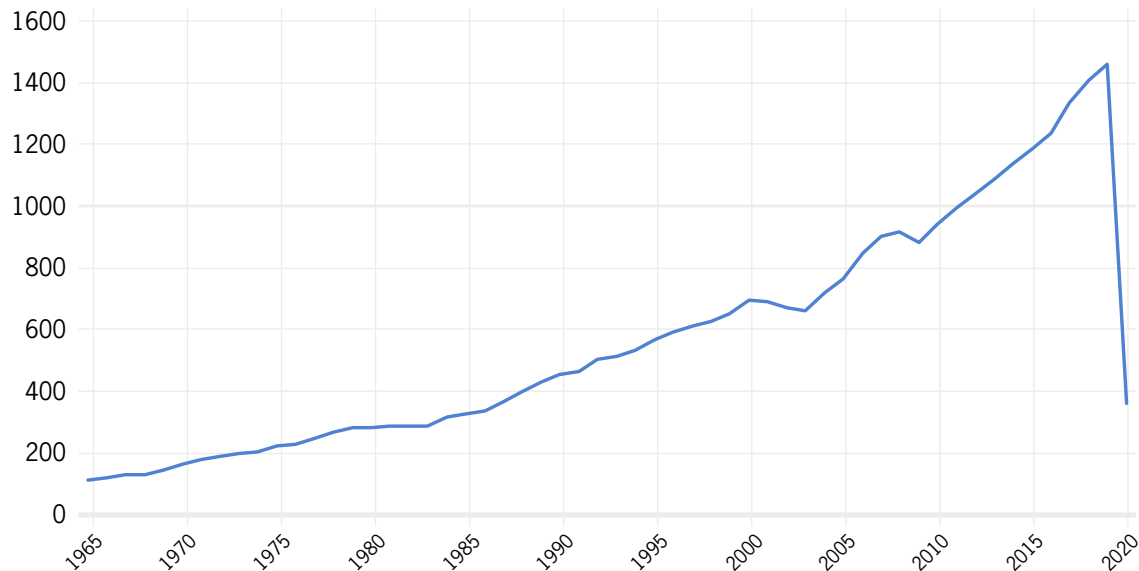
redefinition of the Spanish political economy under the demands of financial capital, which requires going “light”, with regulatory flexibility in labour, fiscal and environmental matters, among others. Moreover, this new round of accumulation under the guardianship of the mega-funds will also have, as we will see below, important consequences on tourism.

The burst of the 2008 crisis shifted from what is called the financial economy to the productive or real economy with a sharp increase in unemployment. When the crisis shifted to the productive economy, those classes that had benefited from the so-called “wealth effect”, resulting for example from the increase in purchasing power that allowed owning a home associated with financial dynamics and the increases in property costs during the bubble, were suddenly dragged down by the mutation of this “wealth effect” into a “poverty effect”. Also, the freezing or reduction in the price of real estate assets and the fall in productive activity paralyzed the granting of credits that enabled the purchasing expansion, and also, the payment of contracted debts became enormously complicated (López and Rodríguez, 2010).

### Tourism as a spatial fix

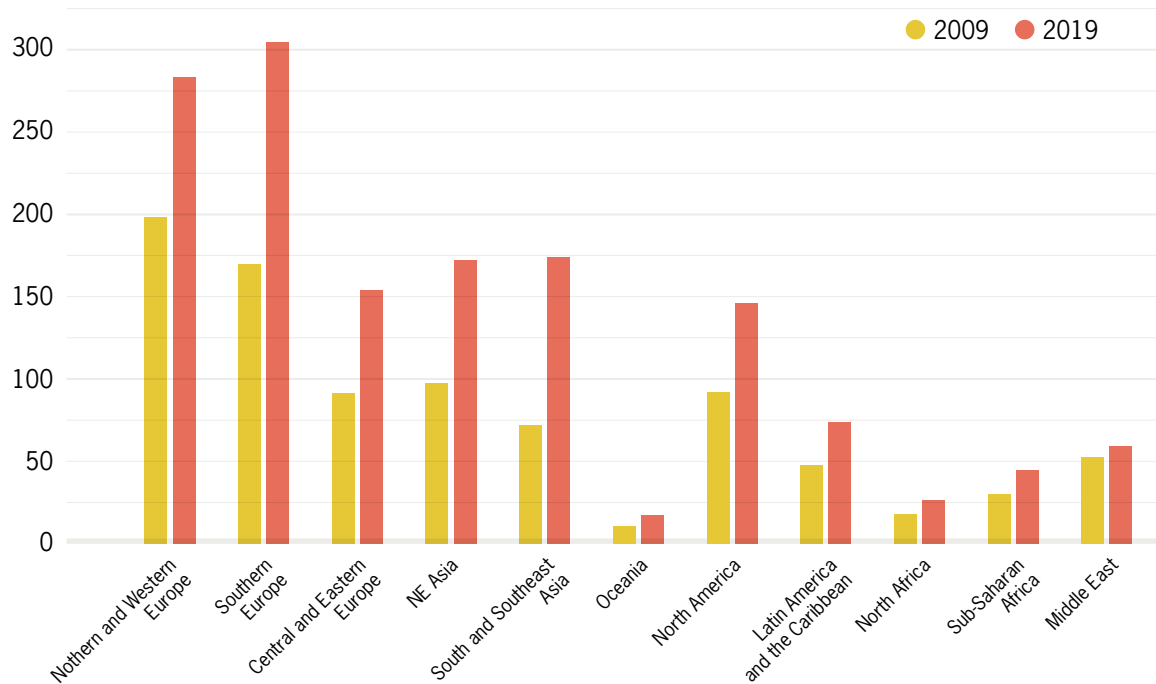
The shift of the financial crisis to the real economy also led to a fall in consumption, causing tourism to be one of the worst affected sectors at first. Obviously, like unemployment, mortgage defaults, and waves of evictions soared (Desmond, 2017), this also led to a fall in global tourism flows (Murray, 2015). It was a geographically unequal decline that had a greater impact on the countries most affected by the crisis, such as Spain and Greece. However, this slowdown in the touristic circuit was relatively brief, and given the real estate and economic collapse, the command centres of global capitalism managed to find a way out of the crisis by deepening the path of tourism accumulation on a global scale. In this sense, Robert Fletcher (2011) has **defined tourism as the main spatial fix to the contradictions that emerged during the 2008 crisis**. **Figure 1** shows the sharp increase in international tourism flows throughout the 2010s from just over 900 million tourist arrivals in 2009 to almost 1.5 billion in 2019. This dramatic increase was seen in practically all the world’s sub-regions, but it was certainly in South Europe and South and Southeast Asia that this new tourism expansion was experienced most intensively (see **Figure 2**). In Southern Europe in particular, multiple manifestations of social malaise are emerging as a result of the deepening of the touristification that is occurring alongside austerity policies (Martínez-Caldentey and Murray, 2019).

Figure 1.  
**Evolution of international tourist arrivals (unit: millions).**



Source: UNWTO.

Figure 2.  
**Evolution of international tourist arrivals according to world subregion 2009-2019 (unit: millions).**



Source: UNWTO.

## Restructuring and redefining tourism corporations

Beyond the large numbers, it is important to look at some aspects of the political economy of global touristification over the last decade. First, as a result of the 2008 financial crisis, after consecutive company bankruptcies –particularly [airlines](#), such as the case of the Italian Alitalia for which Silvio Berlusconi created the [Fenix rescue plan](#) – there was a process of restructuring and redefining tourism corporations. This process was characterized, in the first place, by capital concentration processes, as was the case of airline mergers such as the one between Iberia and British Airways, creating the giant [IAG in 2009](#). It also encouraged large tour operators to take over companies affected by the crisis, which resulted in a dizzying process of tour operator concentration that in Europe was led by TUI and Thomas Cook, and which was accompanied by a greater increase in tour operators' participation in different segments of the tourism production system (Murray, 2012: 1803-1805). Thus, the very [European Commission](#) warned that only five companies accounted for 70% of the European Union's (EU) tour operation. Moreover, these companies had become true tourism monsters by carrying out vertical integration processes with the expansion of their group into the hotel, aeronautical, cruise, etc. sectors.

Secondly, **those companies that primarily relied on bank financing for their expansion projects**, and not on their resources, as was the case of many hotel chains, **were trapped by the bursting of the real estate bubble** - which included touristic real estate - **and the growing problems to pay their debts**. Moreover, some hotel corporations, such as many of the Spanish chains, had financial institutions among their shareholders, which were also the same ones that had provided them with mortgage loans. With the outbreak of the crisis, real estate assets were devalued, the chains renegotiated their debts, paralyzed their expansion projects, made changes in their shareholding structures, and those that could not withstand the impact of the crisis went bankrupt. At the same time, a sales cycle began, which was accelerated when tourist flows resumed.

In the case of the **Spanish hotel chains**, a substantial change took place, which was characterized first by a dynamic trade of hotel properties; second, a change in the financing sources with a greater presence of financial capital; third, the withdrawal of the companies and their investments abroad and their concentration in the Spanish territory; and, fourth, the growing division between hotel ownership and the

hotel companies that operate them. This required strong state support and a change in regulations that allowed a new accumulation cycle to emerge. Normative changes include the regulation of real estate investment funds - SOCIMI (*Sociedades Cotizadas de Inversión Inmobiliaria*) - (Gabarre, 2019; Rodríguez and Espinoza, 2018), support for tourism projects by easing urban, spatial and environmental regulations (Blázquez et al., 2015), and the reduction of labour regulations (Cañada, 2015, 2016).

In this cycle, **more financialized capital** (Yrigoy, 2016) **with a North American matrix has gained protagonism**, as has occurred in the Spanish corporate map (Juste, 2017; Ramiro and González, 2019). After such transformations, one of the first hotel SOCIMIs to be created was [Bay Hotels & Leisure](#), between Hispania, whose main shareholder was George Soros, and the Barceló Group. In 2019, Blackstone real estate investment fund, one of the global financial-real estate giants with strong penetration in hotel corporations such as the [Hilton](#) or [Motel 6](#), launched a [takeover bid for Hispania](#) and became the [main hotel owner in Spain](#) with a total of 71 establishments and 18,894 rooms.

However, on the international scene, this process was uneven, depending on each hotel corporation's characteristics and the policies deployed by the governments of their respective countries to deal with the crisis. In this sense, **the large North American hotel chains, strongly linked to financial capital, were strengthened after the crisis**. This is due to two reasons. In the first place, the management method characterised by franchising or management contracts, and therefore detached from the ownership of the real estate, meaning that these companies were not directly affected by the financial-real estate collapse, as the real estate was largely owned by property investment funds or other groups specialized in real estate. In the second place, the monetary expansion policy carried out by the Federal Reserve, from the first moment of the 2008 crisis, made it possible to increase the capitalization of big financial capital and large US corporations, which subsequently rushed to buy (devalued) assets in the rest of the world. In this context, according to the [Hotelsmag](#) magazine ranking, we can see how the top ten US hotel chains have gone from controlling 3.2 million rooms in 2008 to 5.6 million in 2019. As an outstanding example, we have the leading hotel chain, **Marriott International**, which in 2008 had 592 thousand rooms, rising to 1.35 million in 2019.

Moreover, another substantial change in the structures of global tourism capital is closely related to **the rise of Chinese and Indian capitalism**. It is the Asian

capitals that were particularly strengthened when the structures of European capital were rebuilt from the crisis. Asian capital has begun to conquer new areas of capital beyond its borders (Nolan, 2014). In the hotel chain scenario, the Chinese and Indian companies occupy top positions in the [ranking](#): the Chinese state-owned company **Jin Jiang International**, with ten thousand hotels and 1,81,230 rooms, is the second largest global chain, and the Indian **Oyo Rooms**, with 45,600 hotels and 1,054,000 rooms, is the third. The mechanisms by which some of these companies have expanded have been based on the acquisition of other groups, as in the case of the previously mentioned Jin Jiang, [which took over the Radisson Hotel Group](#), or the case of the Thai company **Minor International**, [which acquired the Spanish NH Hotel Group](#).

Throughout the expansive period from the 2008 crisis to the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis, **the global touristic boom was accompanied by a sharp increase in the number of tourist accommodation buildings, and the production and settlement of tourist areas**, as in the case of the Chinese island of Hainan (Mostafanezhad, 2019). Thus, according to data from the UNWTO (United Nations World Tourism Organization), the number of tourist accommodation rooms, on a global scale, had increased from 20.5 million in 2008 to 29.68 million in 2018, 41.9% of which were controlled by the top two hundred international hotel chains. At the same time, the logics of tourist production were expanding and spreading to spaces that had previously been relatively excluded from touristification, further enhanced by the logics of production and consumption of post-Fordist capitalism. In this sense, new market segments emerged in an increasingly broad and unique offer, such as *slum tourism* (tourism in slum cities, whose main attraction is poverty itself) (López, 2020), *dark tourism* or *necrotourism* (Light, 2017), nature tourism or ecotourism (Voumard, 2019), or even the so-called Anthropocene tourism to visit “the end of nature” (Fletcher, 2019).

### Urban touristification, in the eye of the storm

Undoubtedly, the new tourist commodification frontier that has received the most attention has been the one linked to **urban touristification and the tourist commodification of housing**. This is due, to some extent, to the massive social protest that has been organized in many cities against the appropriation of public space by

touristic capital, home dispossession and housing incorporation into the tourist production circuit, the tourist overflow of certain cities or neighbourhoods (overtourism), among others (Colomb and Novy, 2016; Milano and Mansilla, 2018). To a large extent, this social protest against the processes of urban touristification has fuelled a growing critical reflection on the logic of touristification (Cañada and Murray, 2019).

In order to understand the post-crisis, boom in urban tourism, it is crucial to appreciate a series of interlinked processes. In the first place, the bursting of the real estate bubble caused significant amounts of residential property to become toxic assets. The capital and state formula to solve this situation and revalue these assets was carried out through several different mechanisms: direct public bailout with the creation of bad banks, such as the SAREB in Spain (Gabarre, 2019). Another mechanism was a regulatory change to eliminate obstacles to these assets' circulation and thus facilitate the entry of capital and reactivate the real estate market, which in the Spanish case resulted in the amendment of the leasing law to facilitate tenant evictions. Also, the creation of the Listed Real Estate Investment Companies (SOCIMI in Spanish) law and the abolition of corporate tax for these companies (Rodríguez and Espinosa, 2018).

In the second place, given the financial and real estate meltdown, one of the accumulation sectors that emerged was linked to technology start-ups that were advertised as the new players in changing capitalism towards a presumed "collaborative economy". Thus, what is known as "platform capitalism" emerged as one of the most important responses to the 2008 crisis, allowing sophisticated profit extraction strategies to be carried out through a combination of formulas: high capacity for global expansion through networking; high possibilities for tax evasion; low investment, except for the algorithms themselves; and especially a high capacity for social control through the management of its raw material, which is data (Srnicek, 2017). This is why Evgeny Morozov (2018) defines big-tech capitalism as a technological neo-feudalism. In fact, Airbnb was one of the start-ups that emerged in the middle of the 2008 crisis, which focused on the holiday home rental market. Through this platform and other similar ones, around four million homes were introduced into the tourist production circuit in 191 countries around the world, triggering a phenomenon known as *airbnbification* (Oskam, 2019). The remains of the real estate bubble were recycled through the tourist commodification of properties by Airbnb,



but *airbnbification* has also become a powerful mechanism for accelerating the processes of accumulation by dispossession in cities (Milano and Mansilla, 2018).

## COVID-19, the root causes of the causes

Towards the end of 2019, the World Health Organisation (WHO) activated health alerts when pneumonia cases in the Chinese city of Wuhan were reported. Located in the south-eastern corner of the country, the city is home to eleven million people and is one of China's major industrial hubs with many investments by multinational companies. Especially Wuhan had been postulated as [the world's new Detroit](#), a reference to automobile manufacturing in the former home of American industry. At the beginning of 2020, the situation was already alarming, and the Chinese authorities enacted drastic measures to deal with a major health crisis, first with the isolation of Wuhan, which gradually spread to other cities in the province of Hubei, affecting around fifty million people.

Initially, the causes of pneumonia were unknown, but it was soon concluded that it was not any of the similar diseases known in the last few years, such as SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) or MERS (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome). In January 2020, a new coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, was known to be circulating. The severity of the situation was not yet fully assessed in that month. Then, [the WHO still stated that](#): “WHO does not recommend any specific health measures for travellers, but they are advised to visit a health facility and to explain their travel route to their doctor in case they develop any respiratory symptoms during or after their journey”. Health authorities, and global leaders, took it as a phenomenon external to capital and geographically isolated and limited to China, and more specifically to the region of Hubei. The global capitalist normality, and of course international travel, which was one of its centrepieces, was not supposed to be disturbed.

When it was revealed that the disease's ground zero was in a Wuhan market where wild animals were sold, the colonial criticism over Chinese or Asian cultural distinctiveness was intensified. In any case, it can be said that the commodification of exotic animals is mostly linked to the consumption patterns of global elites (Malm, 2020). Even conspiracy theories spread claiming that it was a manufactured disease by the Chinese authorities. As the virus expanded, so did conspiracy theories and fake news, mainly coming from [right-wing extremists](#).

Over time, and at a fast pace, more has been learned about its origins. The COVID-19 coronavirus is associated with a bat population virus in the province of Yunnan that would have jumped from bats to humans through intermediate hosts (Boni et al., 2020). *Chiroptera* - Bats - are the second most diverse mammal order with about 1,200 species. These animals have a high tolerance to viruses mainly due to two factors: in the first place, because of their flying ability, they can reach extremely high body temperatures without being affected at all. In the second place, as gregarious animals, they have what could be defined as herd immunity to these pathogens (Loureiro, 2020). This was not the first time in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that a virus has jumped from bats to humans. For example, SARS in 2002 was linked to bats and civets as carriers, and MERS was linked to camels in 2012. This phenomenon is defined as zoonosis –or zoonotic disease-, which refers to infectious diseases that spread from animal species to humans. Despite some demands to eliminate bats as a solution, multiple researchers have pointed out how infectious diseases have been rising to alarming levels in recent years. The spillover of these animal infectious diseases is mainly due to the degradation of the planet's biodiversity: deforestation, habitat fragmentation, species extinction and, illegal trafficking of species, among the main causes. A process that feeds back with climate change. Bats subjected to greater stress due to habitat alteration are forced to move to plantations, farms, or urban areas seeking shelter and food. The greater the biodiversity, the lower the risk of zoonotic spillover. Therefore, the main protection against the spread of these diseases lies in the protection of biodiversity (Malm, 2020). Biodiversity protection that acts against the risk of zoonotic spillover must be structured on the principles of the so-called conservation revolution or convivial conservation. It should also go beyond “capitalist realism” and its formulas for biodiversity conservation based on “islands of nature” in the midst of the global ecosystemic disorder (Büscher and Fletcher, 2020).

However, if we focus only on biodiversity protection, we may make the mistake of ignoring the causes behind biodiversity devastation. **The spread of industrial agriculture and livestock farming, along with their animal mega-farms - true infectious powder kegs - and natural habitat destruction for industrial crops - soybeans and African palm - has been identified as main reasons behind the spread of infectious diseases** (Davis, 2020; Wallace, 2020). For example, the Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2014 was closely linked to the African palm boom in the



region. A boom that was boosted by the World Bank, the Guinean government, and the US, British, Indonesian, and Malaysian transnational corporations (Wallace and Wallace, 2016).

### The virus spread on a global scale

In order to understand the virus's spread on a global scale, new elements of analysis must be introduced. The first one relates to the virus itself and its impact on people. In fact, it is a very efficient virus as its effects on human hosts are not always lethal, which ensures its reproduction. This differs from other viruses, as in the case of the [Ebola](#) virus, with an average mortality rate of around 50%, compared to [COVID-19](#) which is around 4% - the highest in Yemen (29.5%) and Mexico (8.8%) -.

The second factor to consider is **the key role played by global tourism through international flights in the spread of the virus, with tourists becoming the main carriers of the virus** (Iaquinto, 2020). One of the first cases was a [tourist from Wuhan](#) who travelled to Bangkok in early January of 2020, who was hospitalized when she arrived at the Thai airport and was found to have a fever. Then, the infectious diseases protocol was immediately activated. Towards the end of January 2020, Italy confirmed two cases of COVID-19 in [Chinese tourists](#) who, after landing in Milan, travelled to Rome. At the same time in Spain, a German tourist in La Gomera and a British tourist in Mallorca were hospitalized, and a man who had travelled to Nepal died in Valencia. The carriers were not exclusively Chinese tourists travelling in Europe, but British, German, and Swiss executives who had either visited China on business trips or worked there (Bernabe, 2020) - the [European zero-patient](#) seems to have been a German businessman after meeting his Shanghai-based business partner. In the case of the United States, the virus arrived through a flight from Wuhan to Seattle, where the state of emergency was declared on the 29th of February 2020. But the most significant outbreak was in New York, which was due to the arrival of European flights. Given the news of the virus' spread, flights to China were cancelled, but the rest of international flights remained unchanged. Airports became true epidemic hubs (Méndez, 2020). The quick expansion in Latin America was also primarily linked to tourist flows: in the first place, Latin American tourists who visited European countries where they contracted the disease, as in the case of the first COVID-19 patient in [Mexico](#) who had been to Italy. In the second place, European

tourists who developed the disease while being on holidays in Latin America, as in the case of an Italian tourist who was the first patient in the [Dominican Republic](#) or the first cases in [Cuba](#) who were also Italian tourists. In the third place, the trips of emigrants who worked in a European country and returned (as tourists) to their countries for holidays, as was the case with the first patient in [Ecuador](#) who lived in Spain and returned to Ecuador for holidays. By mid-March 2020, the virus was found in 146 countries, largely due to global air travel (Gössling et al., 2021).

In addition to international tourist flows and flights, two major tourist sources of COVID-19's dissemination should be highlighted. In Europe, the ski resort of Ischgl (Austria), known as the “Ibiza of ice” and close to Italy, was still operating at full capacity in March. Ischgl became the main accelerator of the first virus wave in Europe (Oltermann and Hoyal, 2020). The case of cruise ships has been dramatic, as they became large cages where the virus was spreading. Moreover, in the case of cruise ships, the class differences between crew and passengers were highly tangible (Teberga, 2020).

As we have just outlined, **there is a clear correlation between the dynamics of planetary touristification, which is closely linked to the spatial logics of global capitalism, with offshoring processes and the virus' spread.** In a certain way, COVID-19 could be understood as another dimension of global capitalism's contradictions in general, and in particular a contradiction of that peculiar path of accumulation that we call touristification. This is why the critical reflections developed over the last few years should gain more strength than ever. In fact, this has been shown in multiple publications throughout 2020, such as published articles in [Alba Sud](#), or academic journals such as [Tourism Geographies](#) or the [Journal of Sustainable Tourism](#). However, an intense debate has been triggered in the academic world –as the one promoted by Jim Butcher on the TRINET tourism information network- where critical approaches on touristification have been accused of damaging tourism, particularly at a time when tourism was going through its biggest crisis in history. In the Spanish case, this view was also stated, for example, in the Spanish newspaper *El País*, where it was said: “[the situation that has been generated in only two months also puts in quarantine some of the assumptions that prevailed in a certain ‘tourism-phobia’](#)”. As Freya Higgins-Desboilles (2020) explains, what this debate puts on the table is the dispute between those critical positions that pursue social

transformation, also regarding touristification, against those dominant positions of preserving the established social (tourist) order.

### A hit sector in free fall

By March, Europe had already become the COVID-19 epicentre. It was not until the 11th of March that the [WHO declared COVID-19 as a pandemic](#). Up to that point, the world's ruling classes tried by all their means that the virus did not affect the economy. **Since the 11<sup>th</sup> of March, two measures have spread throughout the world: border closures and severe travel restrictions, with the virtual suspension of air travel, and confinement.** These measures undoubtedly challenged the economy and the so-called global value chains. A simultaneous supply and demand shock that affected first the primary circuit of accumulation, the one linked to the so-called productive economy (Méndez, 2020). Certainly, one of the sectors that should have been most impacted by the pandemic was tourism, as the key conditions that enable the development of mass tourism - mobility and human interactions on a large scale - were disrupted. However, this was not the first time that infectious disease had disrupted the tourist cycle. In fact, in the current circumstances of severe planetary ecological disruption, zoonotic spillovers and their effects are likely to become more frequent if the conditions leading to these diseases are not reversed. Moreover, the impacts of climate change may become much more devastating than those caused by the pandemic (Gössling et al., 2021; Malm, 2020).

After the global pandemic was officially announced, international tourism lobbies, such as the UNWTO or the World Travel & Tourism Council ([WTTC](#)), or national ones, such as [Exceltur](#) in Spain, reacted by elaborating impact forecasts of the global pandemic. These reports have been used to pressure governments to take action to support and rescue the sector. As an example, the May 2020 UNWTO Barometer analysed the impact of COVID-19 and predicted overall declines between 58% and 78% in international tourist arrivals with a drop in international tourism receipts from an all-time peak of USD 1.48 trillion in 2019 to an estimated 570-310 million USD (UNWTO, 2020a). On the other hand, the WTTC estimated a decline in tourism GDP from USD 8.87 trillion in 2019 to USD 3.32 trillion in the worst-case scenario, resulting in dramatic employment destruction (WTTC, 2020a). According to these reports, the Northern Hemisphere summer season was practically lost, but

there was still some hope that at least the Southern Hemisphere summer season would not be so affected. In November, the worst predictions were confirmed: international tourist arrivals declined by 72% compared to the same period of the previous year and the volume of international tourists, around 360 million, was at the same levels as in the mid-1980s (UNWTO, 2020b).

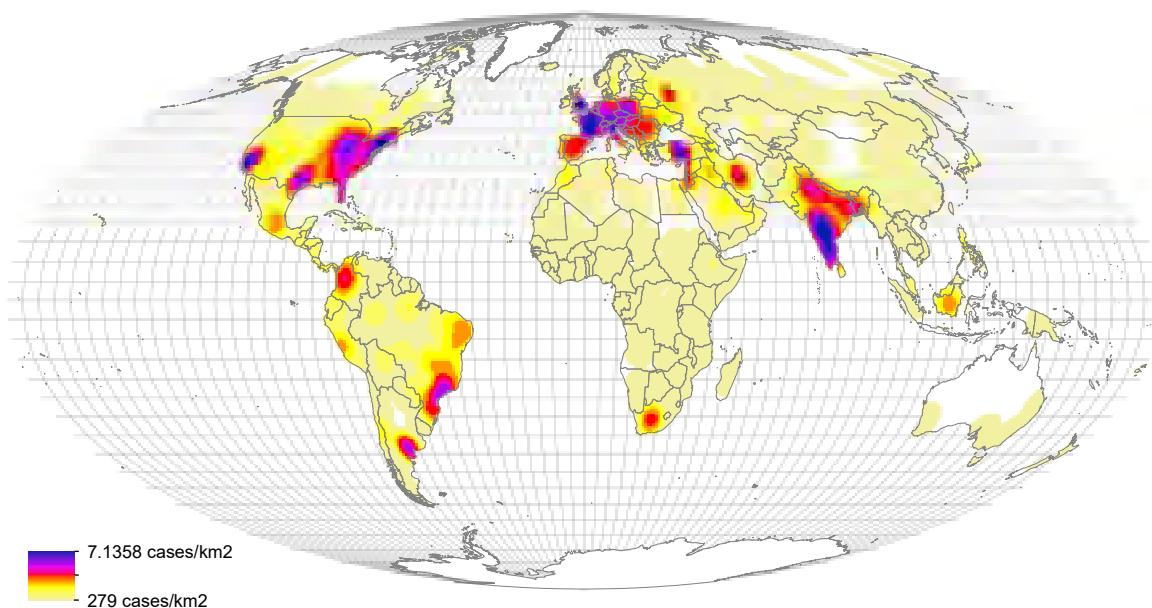
## A pandemic with uneven impact

At this point, **the uneven space-time incidence of the pandemic must be highlighted**, as can be seen in **Figure 3**. To classify the uneven COVID-19 geography, several different factors can be identified, which are not mutually exclusive, but rather combine and complement each other to different degrees. The first one depends on the **degree of commercial and touristic connection** - hyper-mobility - which allows us to understand the high number of cases in advanced capitalist countries - the US and the EU - but also in Southern countries that have played a major role in the world-economy since the previous crisis, such as the BRICS. The second factor refers to **the health services' quality**, as evidenced in advanced capitalist countries such as [Spain](#), where public services have been undermined after many years of cutbacks and the progress of health privatization, or the [USA](#), which has been defined as the panacea of health neo-liberalization. However, access to health and its neo-liberalization remains more prevalent in much of the Global South. Thus, it can be concluded that austerity and privatization of healthcare kill (Stuckler and Basu, 2013; Sell and Williams, 2020). In third place, a notable dimension in the deepening pandemic has to do with **inequalities**. Its impact is more severe in the most vulnerable groups of societies that are deeply affected by inequalities. As **Joan Benach**, director of the Research Group on Inequalities in Health (GREDS-EMCONET) at Pompeu Fabra University (UPF) in Barcelona, often states, the important thing in health is not so much the genetic code, but rather the postcode. As such, the type of work and the conditions in which it is performed, and the housing conditions and geographical environments in which people live, are crucial (Benach, 2020). This has been highlighted regarding the incidence of COVID-19 with a strong racialized and class-based component in cities such as New York (Wallace and Wallace, 2020). The fourth factor would be related to population **ageing**, where [African](#) countries are opposites, with a younger population compared to an ageing Europe. Europe, there-

fore, is much more vulnerable to the virus (Kathintsky and Aburto, 2020). A fifth factor has to do with the **proportion of the urban population and demographic density**, especially notable in the case of India, [where cities such as Mumbai have had more than half of their slum dwellers affected by the disease](#). Lastly, and in sixth place, depending on the **political responses to the pandemic**, which range from the delirium of leaders such as [Donald Trump](#) in the USA, [Daniel Ortega](#) in Nicaragua or [Jair Bolsonaro](#) in Brazil, to measures of strong biopolitical control and authoritarian order such as China. Regarding institutional aspects, we must highlight the fact that those countries that previously experienced pandemic health crises, such as Ebola in Africa or SARS in Asia, were better prepared to deal with the COVID-19 crisis (An and Tang, 2020; Maxmen, 2020).

Figure 3.

**Heat map of cumulative COVID-19 cases up to 30 December 2020**



Source: own elaboration based on the data from [Gisanddata](#).

Regarding the COVID-19 impact, it is also important to introduce the concept of **vulnerability**, which in the case of highly specialized tourism production regions was quite high (Aledo et al., 2020; Méndez, 2020). We must remember and empha-

size that vulnerability is not a natural attribute, but is fundamentally a socio-political construction, understood as a set of structural conditions that limit the capacity to respond to systemic hazards. In this sense, social paths and social contexts allow us to understand and explain the social gaps in the unequal display of vulnerability. **The Spanish case is a leading example where a combination of several dynamics allows us to understand how its high vulnerability has led to a high pandemic incidence**, especially during the spring of 2020. In the first place, the structural conditions characterized by integration into the capitalist world-economy based on tourism and real estate production, which has been linked to a deep de-industrialisation. In the second place, the high dependence on the external supply of goods, including health materials, was particularly evident during the toughest moments of [March and April](#) when there was even a lack of safety equipment for health workers – [this group was one of the worst affected by COVID-19](#)-. In the third place, a full-scale application of neoliberal doctrine and austerity policies, especially after the 2008 crisis, undermining public health and other public social protection services. In the fourth place, the political response to the pandemic, as the governing classes - under great pressure from corporate lobbies - hesitated to take drastic measures that would put the economy at risk, particularly in the approach of Easter holidays and the start of the tourist season. In the fifth place, the limits of the European Union as a political framework, with the nation-state playing an increasingly important role, which was against a collective health response (Murray and Cañada, 2020).

However, while Spain may be an example of the increased vulnerability associated with tourism specialization, we also find other cases where tourism specialization did not lead to greater vulnerability to the pandemic's impact. In particular, [Greece](#), which suffered intensely from austerity policies, did not experience the dramatic situations of Spain or Italy. This was particularly due to two reasons. Greece, despite being a major tourist power, was less exposed to international tourist flows than Italy and Spain, and the entry of the virus came later. Moreover, the political and social response to the pandemic was faster and more drastic, which was partly because, given the limitations resulting from austerity policies, there were insufficient resources, and therefore confinement, flight stoppages, restrictions on non-essential activities, and a media campaign reminding citizens of the risks they were running due to the lack of health resources were implemented. Other remarkable cases are those of **Singapore**, which, like most Southeast Asian countries, had a health policy to prevent infectious diseases before the outbreak of COVID-19. **Iceland** and **New**



**Zealand** carried out an early and forceful preventive policy response –[go hard, go early](#)-. At the time of the pandemic outbreak, those countries were in the low tourist season, and therefore with few tourist flows, and counted on a very robust public health system too (Fouda et al., 2020).

### **Confinement, restrictions and an uncertain recovery**

In most countries, closure and confinement were applied as a measure to control the pandemic's spread. Quarantine was applied to different degrees and for a different duration depending on the country, with [Manila's](#) case standing out with an interrupted six-month quarantine. The measures taken were described as those of an extreme situation, such as a military conflict. The official rhetoric identified the fight against COVID-19 as if it were a war: exceptional measures in an exceptional emergency. Malm (2020) wonders what differentiates the coronavirus emergency from other emergencies, such as the climate emergency, so that the measures taken blocked capitalism itself. According to the author, the prioritization of health over economics in the COVID-19 emergency is fundamentally a class issue, because while climate change disruptions affect (and will affect) poor populations in the South much more severely, COVID-19 also takes the lives of ageing populations in the Global North.

The priority during March and April of 2020 was to bend the curve of infected people and thus be able to re-establish what was defined as the “new normality” which, as **Santiago Alba Rico** pointed out, would be articulated on the [previous pathological normality](#). As the end of the lockdown appeared to come on the horizon, pressures started to grow for de-escalation to compensate for the wasted time and to avoid further damage to capital. The disruption of the global economy was ushering in a capitalist crisis of a greater magnitude than the one of 2008. In April 2020, the [International Monetary Fund](#) forecasted a 3% fall in global GDP, if the economic activity would recover in the second half of the year. The desires and pressures to revive the economy and reactivate the tourist sector led to some measures being proposed towards the end of April of 2020, which were aimed at creating “[travel bubbles](#)”, [touristic corridors](#) or [COVID passports](#) for a theoretically safe travel.

**In May of 2020, the European Commission launched a plan to boost tourism** (EC, 2020) and the main [Mediterranean sun and beach destinations in Europe](#) began

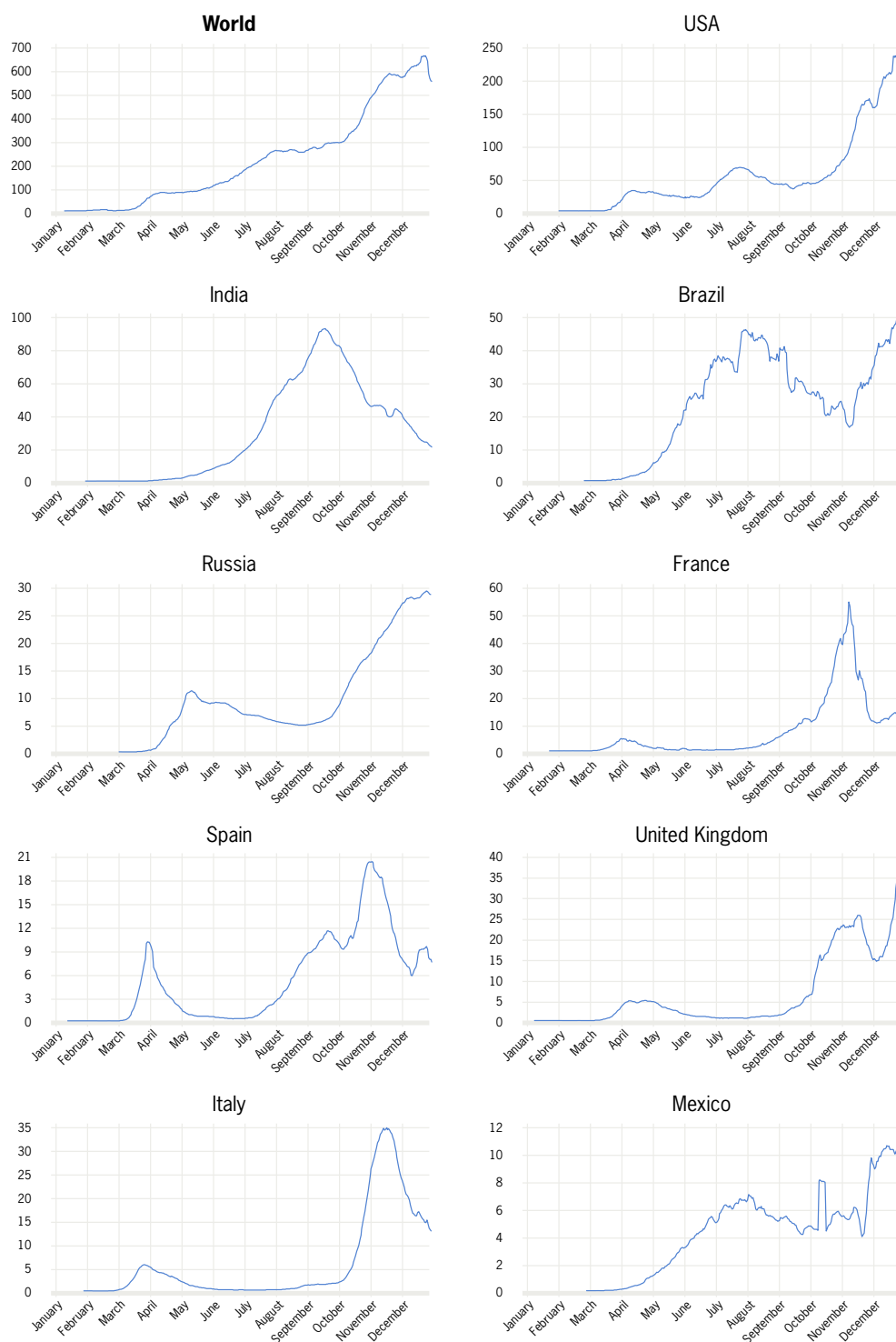
a new battle to attract foreign tourists. One of the main obstacles was the proposal of requiring tourists to spend a 14-day quarantine at their destination and a 14-day [quarantine](#) when returning home. In the case of Spain, the first [German-Balearic corridor](#) began to operate at the beginning of June, without the need for tourists to quarantine either at origin or at the destination. With the arrival of summer, a gradual de-escalation began, the tourist season kicked off and there was a certain social relaxation that was due, among other things, to the accumulated fatigue during the confinement and to the hope that the virus would be less aggressive with the increasing temperature and humidity. Consequently, this resulted in a spike in the number of infections. Thus, **the recovery of international tourism was only sustained until the end of July**, after the [British government excluded Spain from the list of safe countries](#) and people travelling from Spain had to be quarantined. Shortly afterwards [Germany and the Netherlands](#) advised not to travel to different parts of Spain. In the middle of August, which is the peak of the tourist season in Mediterranean destinations, many touristic establishments were closed. The worst predictions came true. The hasty reopening and de-escalation, carried out with deficient tracking systems, were responsible for the virus regrowth – [Madrid](#) being the paradigmatic example - as criticized by twenty Spanish scientists in the prestigious journal *The Lancet* (García-Basteiro et al., 2020).

After summer and with the progressive de-escalation, with the economies reopening, greater concentrations of people in closed spaces -such as public transport-, the return to schools, the announced “second wave” took place. This was the case in most parts of the world, as can be seen in **Figure 4**, and must do not only with the increasing de-escalation, but also with the different policy responses, and the fact that the virus has not gone away. Following the announcement of the [Pfizer vaccine](#) in early November 2020, there was, along with growing optimism, a certain social relaxation linked to the proximity of the Christmas holidays and other festivities (e.g. Thanksgiving Day in the US -26 November-, Black Friday -27 November-, or the long weekend of the Constitution in Spain -5-8 December-) that would lead to the [third pandemic wave](#). While America and Europe continued to accumulate cases, China seemed to have “tamed” the virus and domestic travel soared during the [golden week](#) –National Day holidays– and also the island of [Hainan](#), known as China’s Hawaii. However, unlike China, which has a strong domestic tourism market, other Southeast Asian countries that were heavily reliant on international tourism, such as [Thailand](#) or [Indonesia](#), suffered a major crisis.



Figura 4.

**Daily new cases of COVID-19 (7-day moving average) in the world and the countries with the highest number of cumulative cases in 2020 (unit: thousands).**



Source: own elaboration based on [WHO data](#).

## COVID-19: further inequality

The pandemic acts as a magnifying glass that amplifies pre-existing contradictions and conflicts. Thus, **if the way out of the 2008 crisis was resolved by deepening inequalities** (Piketty, 2020), **COVID-19 has magnified them** (Martin et al., 2020; FOESSA, 2020). According to Holgersen (2020), we can argue that, instead of celebrating the coronavirus crisis as the moment for transformation or revolution, it should be highlighted that **crises are most violently unleashed on the popular classes**. Therefore, crises should be seen primarily as enemies of the popular classes and thus should be reflected on the social costs that could be triggered in the pandemic's aftermath. The measures adopted to fight the pandemic not only interrupted the primary circuit of capital accumulation but also short-circuited the capacity of social movements to organize and resist. In this sense, César Rendueles (2020) wrote how “a country in quarantine is very similar to the political dystopias of the new right-wing extremism: the army in the streets, calls for national unity, limitation of autonomous power, repressive communitarianism and prime time press conferences by a general whose statements sound like a dialogue out of *La escopeta nacional* [The National Shotgun in English, is a Spanish comedy film directed by Luís García Berlanga in 1978] “.

Just before the outbreak of the pandemic, in February of 2020, [the statement of the UN special reporter on extreme poverty and human rights was published after his official visit to Spain](#) which stated: “I also visited places that I suspect many people in Spain would not recognize as part of their country: a slum in conditions much worse than a refugee camp, with no running water, electricity or sanitation, where migrant workers have been living for years without any improvement in their situation. Neighbourhoods of concentrated poverty where families raise children with a severe shortage of state services, health clinics, employment centres, security, paved roads or even legal electricity supply, or even a segregated school in a poor neighbourhood with a 100% gypsy population and a school dropout rate of 75%”. Spain's tourism powerhouse was one of the EU countries with the highest poverty rates, the leading school dropout rate and the most precarious social protection systems. It is just **with the intensified touristification after the 2008 crisis that inequalities in the main tourist regions were exacerbated**. Thus, the autonomous communities with the highest proportion of the population in social exclusion included

the Canary and Balearic archipelago and the Community of Valencia (Murray and Martínez-Caldentey, 2020). The measures to control the pandemic, in addition to the fear of travelling once the severe confinement restrictions were lifted, have caused a major tourism crisis that has significantly shaken those areas most specialized and dependent on tourism, where the social situation is most dramatic, such as in the [touristic areas of the Catalan coast](#), las [Canary Islands](#), and the Balearic archipelago (Carbonero y Abril, 2020).

In response to the international tourism crisis, governments and tourism lobbies focused on boosting domestic tourism (Blanco and Blázquez, 2020), for example in Italy, where the “[bonus vacanze](#)” – a voucher of up to 500 euros to stimulate domestic tourism–. However, these strategies have had different results depending on the social and economic conditions of each territory, and on the social impact of COVID-19 as well, both from a health and socio-economic point of view. Thus, for example, international tourism played a key role in Spain’s current account balance, which was much higher than in other European touristic countries such as France or Italy, and the mobilization of domestic tourism would need to be significantly higher to compensate for these losses. Thus, while Spain was one of the main tourism exporters in the EU, Germany stood out as a net tourism importer - meaning that more German tourists go abroad than the number of international tourists the country receives-. Thus, in 2019, the net contribution of international tourism to the Spanish balance of payments was 3.7% of GDP (EUR 46.26 billion) (Tourspain, 2020), compared to negative 44.9 billion euros in Germany, representing 1.3% of its GDP (Bundesbank, 2020). As mentioned above, the outbreak of the pandemic led to an increase in domestic tourism, but Spanish society, where even before COVID-19 [40% of the population could not afford to go on holiday](#), was unable to fill the gap left by international tourism –in fact, [Spaniards barely travelled](#) in the summer of 2020-. Germany, on the other hand, did experience a notable increase in domestic tourism and therefore, the tourist expenditure that was made each year in destinations such as Mallorca was generated in situ (Nieves, 2020). In summary, while the international tourism crisis in Spain had a knock-on effect on the economy as a whole and was reflected in the macroeconomic indicators, in the case of Germany the pandemic has led to a reduction in outbound tourism and a strengthening of domestic tourism, with a positive impact on the German economy. **Spain’s high degree of tourism specialization is one of the factors that explains why Spain**

**is estimated to be one of the worst economically affected countries by the pandemic**, with an estimated fall of 12.4% in GDP in 2020 compared to 2019, which is much higher than the EU average of 7.4% and the world average of 4.3% (European Commission, 2020).

Moreover, it is a striking fact that **Latin America and the Caribbean** will be the world's region that will suffer the biggest economic slump, with a 9.1% drop in GDP in 2020, where COVID-19 has pushed 45 million people to the edge of poverty. The Latin American Network for Economic and Social Justice ([Latindadd](#)) exposes how, after decades of neoliberal policies and structural adjustments, the region is the world's most unequal - the 1% of the richest population concentrates 21% of the income - which is combined with a minimal tax burden. Thus, COVID-19 has led to a precarious and vulnerable situation in Latin America and the Caribbean that has further widened patterns of inequality (Latindadd, 2020). Furthermore, the region, which had experienced a certain economic boom in the previous decade thanks to the commodities boom, which resulted in an extractivist round and the expansion of tourism in certain areas, will have serious difficulties in relaunching the accumulation cycle given its high external dependence (García-Macías and García-Zamora, 2020).

### **Transforming capitalism, with winners and losers**

The COVID-19 crisis hit the primary circuit of accumulation - production of goods and services - hard, with tourism as one of the most severely affected sectors. It is important to highlight the fact that **the manner of exit from one crisis contains within itself the seeds of crises to come** (Harvey, 2014). Thus, if one of the main ways out of the 2008 crisis was through the deepening of tourist-based accumulation, the crisis triggered by COVID-19 could have a strong impact right back on it. It is also necessary to remember that crises are moments of creative destruction, which does not mean that all capital forces go bankrupt, but quite the opposite. Therefore, the pandemic, despite being the trigger of a massive capitalist crisis, would become the scapegoat for explaining an unprecedented crisis of global capitalism (Álvarez, 2020a; Harvey, 2020). The explanation would be that a force outside the capitalist logic has triggered a deep global crisis. However, in addition to the fact that the COVID-19 crisis is the result of capital's dynamics rather than a "natural disaster"

(Davis, 2020; Malm, 2020; Foster et al, 2021), it is worth remembering that before the pandemic burst, global capitalism was on the verge of a new crisis, with profits continuing to fall (López and Rodríguez, 2020), in which the world economy had been sustained in large part by the Chinese drive associated with a powerful construction boom (Harvey, 2020), and in which the financial bubble was sustained by continuous liquidity injections by states after the 2008 crisis (Flores, 2020; Foster et al., 2021).

Among other solutions, the way out of the 2008 crisis was solved by the rise of **platform capitalism**. However, through such capitalism, the joint profit rates of global capitalism were not boosted; instead, there has been **a growing competition between capitals for profits**. In this confrontation, the winners are mega-investment funds, such as BlackRock and Vanguard, and platform and technology corporations, the **GAFAMs** (Google -Alphabet-, Amazon, Facebook, Apple, Microsoft), which have become the most highly traded (Srnicek, 2017; Murray, 2020).

The struggle for profit and the conflict between different capital groups also broke out within the tourism capital. A clear example of this can be found behind the bankruptcy of the giant **Thomas Cook** in September 2019. Its downfall was due to a combination of elements: increasing competition from digital capital in travel; deepening financial dynamics (and their turbulences) within large tourism corporations; the growing uncertainties associated with Brexit; and the effects of climate change affecting travel planning by potential tourists (Pratley, 2019).

One of the main capital responses to the pandemic was a global stock market crash. To defuse the situation, central banks reinforced the quantitative easing (QE – [Quantitative Easing](#)) policy –buying bonds, public debt and loan guarantees– providing a huge amount of liquidity under the theoretical assumption that this would, by containing interest rates on corporate bonds and public debt, speed up credit, facilitating the financing of governments, companies and households, and calming the capital panics reflected in the risk premium. Thus, the European Central Bank launched the Pandemic Emergency Purchase Programme ([PEPP](#)), endowed with 750 billion euros, which was increased on several occasions to reach 1.85 trillion euros by the end of 2020, and the United States Federal Reserve (FED) injected some 4 trillion dollars - among the stimulus measures was an income of 1200 dollars per adult, plus 500 for each child - (Sánchez, 2020). Moreover, the monetary authorities

assured their commitment to maintain the helicopter money as long as needed and to relax the bank conditions imposed in the 2008 crisis.

**The effects of this liquidity expansion have benefited large capital, instead of benefiting society as a whole** (Dolack, 2020). This enormous liquidity has allowed, among other things, to keep still active “[zombie corporations](#)” –those that are not able to cover their financial expenses–, [distribute dividends](#), even in companies with losses, [share buyback](#) to avoid the fall in the price of companies, and trigger a stock market bubble activated by the sale of shares because the stock market has become a refuge for investment against other forms, particularly of public debt bonds (Álvarez, 2020b). The stock market dynamics outline a geographical distribution that represents the capital dynamics and its restructuring. Thus, the biggest gains were found in the US stock markets - particularly the companies listed on the Nasdaq (up 43.6%) - China, which is also a great technological power (an increase of 24.83% in the Chinese stock market index, CSI300) and Japan (an increase of 16.01% in the Japanese Nikkei). The boost in these financial centres is due to three factors: first, better expectations of regional economic recovery. Second, the high presence of technology companies. Last, corporations with a strong international presence and expansion prospects. The IBEX-35 is at the other end of the spectrum, leading stock market losses in 2020. This is due, among other things, to the almost non-existent presence of technology companies and the fall of banks, construction and real estate companies, energy corporations, and tourism and travel companies (Fortuño, 2020; Fernández, 2020).

Thus, the disruption of the primary capital circuit has not been accompanied by the disruption of financial dynamics, but rather the opposite, as a context of huge liquidity and uncertainty is ideal for the most aggressive financial capital. In this way, financial and platform capital, which had gained great importance after the 2008 crisis, have been the ones that have benefited the most from the pandemic. Thus, in this whole process Pablo Elorduy (2020) highlights three major winners:

- **Blackstone**, which launched the €9.8 billion [Blackstone Real Estate Partners Europe VI](#) programme, the largest real estate fund in Europe, while its CEO, [Stephen A. Schwarzman](#), was the biggest donor to Trump’s presidential campaign.



- **BlackRock**, the world's largest multinational investment management corporation with a presence in many of the world's largest companies, secured a leading position in what is supposed to be one of the ways out of the COVID-19 crisis, the so-called green economy, thanks to its contract with the European Commission as an advisor for integrating sustainability criteria into banking supervision (CEO, 2020). It also holds important positions in the Biden administration in the US by electing some of its CEOs to positions such as [Brian Deese](#), who has been appointed director of the National Economic Council.
- Lastly, the big winner of COVID-19 has been **Amazon**, along with the **big technology companies** (Alphabet, Apple and Microsoft), which has experienced a dizzying increase in sales and share price. An example of this is the fact that [Jeff Bezos](#), its CEO, has become the richest person in history thanks to COVID-19.

On the other hand, **some of the biggest losers from the pandemic are the BEACH companies** ([Booking](#), [Entertainment](#), [Airlines](#), [Hotels](#)), i.e. those linked to tourism. Some of them have even lost 80% of their value (Nhamo et al., 2020). With the decline in tourism and travel - transport represented 60% of oil consumption before the pandemic - oil companies have also experienced one of the most dramatic falls in history, as oil prices plummeted (Kucharz et al., 2020).

The pandemic is being seen as the trigger for a shift and a deepening of the capital logics that were already taking place before the COVID-19 crisis. This realignment could take the form of: first, the restructuring of the capital owners with the growing importance of mega-investment funds in the capital's governance (Juste, 2020). Second, the rise of technology corporations in the expansion of platform capitalism (Srnicsek, 2017) and surveillance (Zuboff, 2019). Third, the increasing role of the state in sustaining senile capitalism, with strong support and collaboration with capital in surveillance (digitization), in so-called green technologies and robotization (Robinson, 2020). Finally, and fourthly, a spatial reconfiguration of the capitalist world-economy in a new multipolar (dis)order, with the intensification of regional formations and the strengthening of the nation-state. This recomposition could be the culmination of the declining process of old Europe and the rise of the Eastern bloc led by China (Bringel, 2020).

In a context of collapsing tourism activity across nearly the entire globe, **lobbies and large tourism corporations**, which have been characterized by their strong support for weak fiscal regimes, **have demanded governments to come to their rescue** (Bianchi, 2020; Nhamo et al., 2020). The old formula is therefore fulfilled: “*too big to fail*”. Most tourism businesses have suffered a severe setback with the pandemic, with small and medium-sized enterprises being the most seriously affected, many of which are at risk of disappearing or have had to close permanently, as it has happened in the [Canary Island](#) or the [Balearic Island](#).

### Transformations in the aeronautical sector

Probably one of the main examples of tourism bankruptcy is the **aeronautical sector**, illustrated by the [images of empty airports and planes parked](#) in hangars. Aeronautical infrastructures and airlines are an excellent example of the privatization, financing, oligopolistic concentration and precariousness associated with global touristification. A trend that has also been combined with strong entrepreneurial support from states, which still maintain significant stakes in their shareholding structures (Hinkes-Jones, 2014; Ramos, 2019).

Despite its limited contribution to the economy as a whole, as suggested by the OECD (2020), **the role of aviation is key to boosting a whole range of global capitalist activities**. The COVID-19 costs for airlines, as for all tourism companies, are not only due to losses in sales but also due to cancellations. Most airlines were [reluctant to refund tickets](#) and instead offered travel vouchers thinking that the pandemic was just a temporary condition, but over time they have been forced to refund, although this has [led to successive disputes](#) due to airline non-compliance (Nhamo et al., 2020). For this reason, powerful public rescue packages for airlines have been launched, totalling around \$159 billion in August of 2020, covering approximately 38% of the estimated losses. Half of this public injection is in the United States, followed by Germany, France and the Netherlands (Abate et al., 2020; OECD, 2020).

In the EU, airlines pushed for bailouts not to be subject to social constraints, so that [layoffs and workforce restructuring](#) have been allowed. Bailouts have not been either subject to environmental conditions, so airlines did not [need to reduce polluting emissions](#). According to the [airline bailout monitor](#) by Greenpeace, Transport & Environment y Carbon Market Watch, out of the 37 billion euros allocated to airline



bailouts, only those related to Air-France-KLM Group and Austrian Airlines contain environmental constraints that are also extremely weak. This is happening at a time when airlines were being criticized for their contribution to air pollution – the [European Commission](#) acknowledged that the impact of aviation was three times higher than previously estimated – and the lack of action to reduce their contribution to climate change (Rivas, 2020).

In Spain, the COVID-19 outbreak was triggered just as the acquisition of [Air Europa by the IAG-Iberia group](#) for one billion euros was about to be closed. Thanks to the pandemic, IAG has taken over the company for half the price, postponing payment until 2026. This price, however, was linked to the fact that [Air Europa](#) had received loans of 475 million euros from the state through SEPI (*Sociedad Estatal de Prestaciones Industriales*) plus 140 million euros in loans from ICO (*Instituto de Crédito Oficial*), which IAG will have to take over after its acquisition. Also, the other IAG companies, [Iberia and Vueling](#) had jointly received bank loans guaranteed by the state worth 1.01 billion euros. The case of IAG Group is a perfect example of the schizophrenic and contradictory evolution of public airlines - British Airways and Iberia - after a long process of privatization and financialization. The supposedly private multinational company's main shareholder is Qatar Airways (25%), which is owned by the Qatari government, joined by large funds such as Capital Research & Management Co (1.49%), BlackRock (0.88%) and the Norwegian sovereign wealth fund Norges Bank Investment Management (0.82%). Furthermore, the IAG example also represents a possible trend for some large airlines, not only because of the consolidation process with the acquisition of Air Europa but also because of the growing positioning of [Qatar Airways](#) within the group after the announcement of the COVID-19 vaccine and the alleged recovery of tourism. Moreover, it should be noted that the fall of the aeronautical sector has also had repercussions on corporations that own aeronautical infrastructures and aeronautical and military manufacturing companies, such as the American [Boeing](#) group (with losses of 3,487 million dollars) and the European [Airbus](#) with losses of 2,686 million euros). Both companies, considered to be strategic in both the US and the EU, have also been prioritized in rescue plans, such as the [French aviation rescue plan](#) (15 billion euros). Lastly, the case of AENA is equally illustrative of the state's privatization, financialization and corporatist drift of the State. AENA manages Spanish airports, as well as different airports in other countries, and it began trading on the stock market in 2015 follow-

ing the privatization of 49% of the company. Its partners include BlackRock, Capital Research Management Co, Vanguard, Norges, among others, leaving the remaining 51% in the hands of the public company ENAIRE. AENA, which was dragging a [debt of almost six billion euros](#), has been trapped by the abrupt fall in air traffic and some of its partners, such as [BlackRock](#), have cut their shares due to the uncertainty and the difficult (if not impossible) short-term recovery of flights to pre-pandemic numbers. The reduction of the fund's shareholding is an example of the financial strategies of these groups, which reduce their shareholding at critical moments, hoping that the state will assume the debt to take care of the strategic value of the company, which is a true monopoly.

### Shocks in the hotel sector

The **accommodation** sector, particularly **hotel companies**, has been profoundly disrupted by the COVID-19 crisis and this is reflected in a dramatic decline in the occupancy rate. Booking cancellations were triggered by the announcement of the pandemic and many establishments have closed their doors or have been operating at a minimum since March 2020 (Nhamo et al., 2020). As hotel establishments are infectious disease hotspots, the effects of the pandemic have been more severely experienced by companies in this sector.

Given this situation, hotel corporations have implemented different strategies to avoid a drop in revenue, especially once the initial stage of total closure has been overcome. A first approach was to implement COVID-19 [security protocols](#) through alliances with certifying, insurance and technological companies. A second formula involved extracting maximum profitability from hotel facilities by offering [services to non-hosted clients](#). The third option was to transform hotels to offer new hybrid hotel services, with workspaces especially targeting teleworkers and also as a place of residence (Pastor, 2020).

However, the COVID-19 crisis has not affected, and will not affect, all hotel companies equally. It is still very likely that there will be changes in the hotel-based production system, corporate restructuring and even a reshaping of the spatial composition of the hotel production itself. While hotel occupancy rates collapsed in Europe and Latin America, although they slightly recovered to 40% in Europe for a brief period in July, occupancy rates in China have been rebounding to between 60%

and 70% (Fenerty and Rossi, 2020). Thus, the combination of large state-backed or state-owned Chinese hotel companies, early control of the pandemic, discipline imposed by the Chinese government, an expanding Chinese (and regional Asian) domestic market, and a population that is younger than European or North American, may suggest that the tourism production (and hotel-based productions) might shift from the Mediterranean to East Asia.

**The pandemic impact has been different depending on the size of the company, the type of operation carried out, and the geographical distribution.** Thus, for example, the impact of COVID-19 on North American chains has been less severe than in Europe because, in the first place, the US restrictions were less severe than in the EU and many establishments were able to remain open. In the second place, companies focused on city and business tourism -the luxury and business class-, such as Marriott International, suffered a higher incidence than other companies focused on other segments -the economy class-. In the third place, companies with a larger percentage of company-owned establishments - and the associated debt - were more exposed to the crisis than other companies with an operating policy based on management contracts or franchising. In other words, North American chains, such as Hilton, which operated most of their establishments using these formulas, were going to be less affected, in general, than European chains, such as the French Accor (Wilmot, 2020).

In the Spanish case, the impact of the crisis is also different depending on the operating model and the type of company. When the crisis began in 2008, most chains were mainly owners of their establishments. At that time, many companies had to sell hotel assets to reduce their bank debt. It was from this sale process that investment funds emerged with hotel management companies or hotel SOCIMIs (e.g., Blackstone, Hay Partners, CBRE Global Investors, HIG Capital, Meridia Capital, Omega Capital, Starwood Capital, among the main ones). Today the situation has dramatically changed in Spain and a significant number of chains can be differentiated between those that operate hotels through rental contracts (27.4% of the rooms of the top 100 chains), those that own the hotels (56%), and those that operate the hotels through management or franchising contracts (16.2%) (Coello, 2020).

Therefore, a crisis degree of severity can be established according to the operation type. The most affected companies are those operating hotels under rental contracts, as they will not be able to reduce the fixed costs of property leasing by

much, while on the other hand, those classified as asset-light, which operate under management or franchise contracts, are at the other side of the spectrum. But the companies that were best prepared to face the crisis were not only those that were “asset-light”, but also those that reduced fixed costs as much as possible, which was achieved through aggressive outsourcing policies, as was the case of the NH chain, for example (Yrigoy and Cañada, 2019). On the other hand, chains that own their establishments could sell them to cover costs and survive for a certain period. These last ones follow the highly financed model of American and British companies such as Wyndham Hotels Worldwide (100% of hotels in Spain under management or franchise contract), Intercontinental Hotels Group (100% of hotels in Spain), Marriott International (93% of hotels in Spain) or Hilton (79% of hotels in Spain). On the other hand, among the chains that operate most hotels under lease contracts are Barceló Hotel Group (78.4% of rooms in Spain) and NH (71.8%) (Coello, 2020).

Although Spanish hotel companies had experienced a golden period between 2010 and 2019, with record profits, the COVID-19 crisis began to deplete their cash flow. [NH](#) was one of the first hotel companies to obtain a loan of 250 million euros coordinated by BBVA and Santander with the backing of the ICO (Official Credit Institute). The [Grupo Barceló](#) also obtained 760 million euros in bank financing, in addition to 200 million euros guaranteed by the ICO. To cope with the impact of the crisis, hotel companies increased bank loans, thereby raising bank exposure, which in the case of the large groups would amount to around 3.5 billion euros (Ugalde, 2020).

If banking collapsed in 2008, dragged down by the real estate bubble, it might be the case that the Spanish banking system could collapse due to the bursting of the tourist bubble and economic paralysis (Larrouy, 2020). Banks have been pressuring hotel companies to sell off real estate assets in order to obtain liquidity. An example of this strategy can be seen in the sale of the [Nobu Hotel Barcelona](#). The hotel owned by Robert de Niro’s Nobu Hospitality chain and operated by the Catalan Selenta Group under a management contract, had to be sold to the ASG Iberia fund. Another example is the sale of the Barceló Group’s emblematic establishment in Mallorca, the [Hotel Formentor](#), for 165 million euros to the Andorran investment fund Emin Capital. With the tourism crisis associated with COVID-19, there has been a profound upheaval, with all kinds of investment funds hoping that some debt-ridden companies will be forced to sell their hotels at bargain prices (Brunet,

2020; Vallano, 2020). Thus, fund managers were raising liquidity in the middle of the crisis to enter the European hotel real estate market: the [Schroder Real Estate Hotels](#) based in Luxembourg (425 million euros); the Spanish [Azora European Hotel & Lodging](#) (680 million euros); or the aforementioned [Blackstone](#) investment fund (9.8 billion euros).

In addition to the increased role of real estate funds and other asset managers in the ownership of hotel establishments, among other real estate assets, we should note three other processes that may occur as a result of the pandemic's restructuring of hotel-tourism production. All these processes can occur in a combined manner and to different degrees. In the first place, as in any capitalist crisis, there is a dynamic of creative destruction that could lead to the **disappearance of companies and their subsequent concentration in large groups**. However, for the time being, the various state subsidies received and the expectation that the tourism cycle will recover soon have prevented the spread of bankruptcies. In any case, tourism companies are already suspending payments in different countries, such as the British hotel chain [Travelodge](#) which, pressured by Secure Income REIT - owned by Goldman Sachs and other hedge funds - from which it had leased the establishments, has managed to sign a CVA (Company Voluntary Arrangement) to reduce the rent and postpone debts. The second contemplated scenario is characterised by a process of **capital concentration**, as shown by the attempted merger between the two largest European hotel chains, the British [IHG \(InterContinental Hotels Group\)](#) and the French [Accor](#). In this context, the expansion formulas of the winning groups are likely to focus mainly on management and franchise contracts, as announced by [Meliá Hotels International](#), which plans to open 58 hotels by 2023 using these formulas. Regarding the above, if the priority forms of operation will be those focused on the reduction of fixed costs, it is very likely that the chains with the greatest experience in this type of operation will gain a global presence. Fundamentally, these will be the Anglo-Saxon companies. This is why, in the case of [Spain](#), there could be an increasing penetration of [American and British hotel chains](#) which is already happening in the Balearic Islands with the entry of Four Seasons, Apple Leisure Group and IHG. Finally, the third process to be considered has to do with the restructuring of **the ownership composition of the hotel chains**. Just before the pandemic, there were already significant changes in this sense, with a greater presence of sovereign wealth funds, such as [Norges Bank](#) with a 3.03% stake in Meliá Hotels International,



a greater extension of Chinese (and Asian) funds in the ownership of Western hotel chains - China's Jin Jiang International had already taken over [Louvre Hotels](#), the [Radisson Hotel Group](#), and had a majority stake in the French group [Accor](#)— and also mega-investment funds such as BlackRock or Vanguard, for example, which are already shareholders in large hotel chains such as Meliá.

### **Tour operators, with less relevance**

In the new restructuring of tourism-hotel capital, a **decline in the prominence of the large European tour operators** that played a key role in the creation of the Spanish hotel chains can be perceived. The two large European tour operators, **TUI** and **Thomas Cook** pursued a powerful policy of horizontal integration, through the absorption of other tour operators, and vertical integration, through expansion into all segments of the tourism production system - mainly airlines, cruises and hotels. The changes in the organization of tourism production, characterized by higher profitability of asset-light groups, already drove Thomas Cook into bankruptcy in 2019, and in the same year, [TUI](#) reported a 28% drop in results compared to 2018. One point to bear in mind about this tourism giant is that, despite being the jewel crown of German tourism, its [main shareholders](#) were the family of the Russian magnate [Mordashov](#) through Unifirm Limited (24.9%), the Egyptian magnate Hamed El Chiaty through DH Deutsche Holdings Limited (4.7%), and the Mallorcan hotel group Riu (3.6%). Under this company composition, the COVID-19 crisis was triggered, which has led the group [to reduce its fleet of aircraft](#) and seek other divestment formulas to reduce its debt burden, such as the [sale of hotels](#). To get around the TUI situation, the German public bank for Reconstruction and Development (KfW) granted the company a [loan of 1.8 billion euros](#) in April 2020 and [another 1.2 billion euros](#) in August 2020. Subsequently, in early January of 2021, a third public aid package of 1.8 billion euros was considered and it was agreed that 420 million euros of this aid would be converted into company's shares, allowing [the German government to own 25% of the company](#). In TUI's drift, we can also see some of the possible drifts of large tourism corporations, in a very similar way to what happened with banking after the 2008 crash, which could be characterized by the entry of governments into the shareholding structures of the companies after having run out of bailouts. This would essentially be a case of the socialisation of losses, but as has

happened, for example, with banking and the high-profile case of the Spanish bank Bankia, it would not mean a redefinition or transformation of the social organization of tourism production.

### **Airbnbification of tourist accommodation**

Finally, the **effects of COVID-19 on the airbnbification process** must also be considered. The disruption of the pandemic interrupted the vertiginous planetary expansion of the tourist commodification of housing by platforms such as Airbnb, Booking or Homeaway. Airbnb had planned its IPO (Initial Public Offering) on the prestigious Nasdaq group when the pandemic broke out and its potential value fell from 50 billion dollars to 31 billion. The dissolution of travel and the sharp drop in the number of stays, mainly in city centres, also dragged down all those who had indulged in the rentier dream by buying homes and turning them over to the unstoppable Airbnb frenzy, with bookings falling by 85% and cancellations rising up to 90%. Just before the pandemic, the mortgage payments paid for themselves and the only thing Airbnb rentiers had to do was to post the best photos on the platform's portal. Given the decline in the tourism business, homeowners in different parts of the world turned their homes to the long-term rental market (Temperton, 2020), while other owners have simply decided to wait for the activity to recover, as is the case in Madrid (Pérez and Casado, 2021). However, the fact that a property is rented for longer stays does not mean that this is at the expense of the airbnbification process that is identified with STR (Short Term Rentals), as the company also offers the LTR (Long Term Rentals) option in its strategy of deepening the global commodification of housing.

In response to the cancellations of a large part of the seven thousand homes Airbnb marketed, the company set up a plan to reimburse stays booked up to May and owners received [25% compensation](#) through the host assistance fund, plus another [10 million](#) dollars to compensate super hosts. To deal with Airbnb's complex situation, its directors obtained a [billion dollars in financing](#) at a 10% interest rate led by the Silver Lake and Sixth Street Partners [funds](#), which were joined by Apollo Global Management, Oaktree Capital Management and Owl Rock, BlackRock, Eaton Vance Corp, Fidelity Investments and T. Rowe Price Group. In fact, after this transaction, [the company's valuation plummeted](#) to 18 billion dollars. One aspect



worth noting is that Airbnb, despite its meteoric rise, reported losses in 2019. This was due to the company's costs increased dramatically with the construction of its headquarters in San Francisco, enlarging its staff and the launch of new products such as Airbnb Experiences or Airbnb Magazine (Grind et al., 2020). To cope with falling revenues in 2020, the company cut [800 million dollars in marketing](#) and announced the [layoff of 1,900 workers](#) - 25% of the global workforce - most of them outsourced workers such as a [call centre in Barcelona](#).

After a turbulent year, Airbnb went public in December 2020. Less than a month earlier, Pfizer announced that it had achieved an effective vaccine against COVID-19, which triggered a [rally in all stock markets](#) especially in the listed BEACH companies. In a context of enormous liquidity, after central bank injections, and with the announcements of the return of the business, as usual, [Airbnb made its debut on Wall Street, doubling its starting value](#), especially to over 100 billion dollars - despite closing the year with losses of around 1.5 billion dollars. A value that exceeded that of the world's leading hotel chains: Hilton, IHG and Marriott. With the IPO, the company's main shareholders, in addition to the [founding partners](#) – Brian Chesky (11.6 billion dollars), Joe Gebbia (10.7 billion) and Nathan Blecharczyk (10 billion), included [Sequoia Capital](#) fund (12.4 billion dollars). Thanks to this fund, which has also participated in companies such as Apple, Instagram and Google, the company had obtained financing to start its expansion in 2009. To understand Airbnb's extraordinary IPO, it is not enough to attribute it to the phenomenon of high liquidity, but it would be reasonable to think that in post-COVID tourism, Airbnb formulas are the ones that will gain predominance in tourism production. On the one hand, the company has the advantages of platform technology corporations, assuming relatively low risks by having fixed costs that are much lower than those of other corporations such as hotel companies. On the other hand, with the potential decline of urban tourism and mass tourism destinations, there is likely to be a deepening of the tourist commodification of housing in rural areas close to metropolitan areas - as has already occurred in much of the EU (European Commission, 2020).

### **Tourism employment, more precariousness**

With the interruption of a large part of tourism activity due to the pandemic, **employment linked to this type of activity has suffered strong destruction**, [compar-](#)

[actively greater than in other sectors](#), and which has highlighted the enormous vulnerability of tourism. In the case of Spain, where [employment in tourism accounted for 12.9% of total employment in 2019](#), according to the National Statistics Institute (INE), this cannot be considered a minor problem. Cases such as [the dismissal in May 2020 of 924 workers in a call centre subcontracted by Airbnb](#) in Barcelona, responsible for customer service, soon alerted us about the looming situation. According to data provided by the union labour Comisiones Obreras, by 2020, half a million people in this sector could have lost their jobs: [up to November 2020, 238,524 people in the hotel and catering industry had stopped paying Social Security contributions](#), and 340,372 people were included in Temporary Employment Regulation Files (ERTE), with an uncertain future that could end in unemployment. In this sense, [from December 2020, cases of dismissals have begun to accumulate](#) in companies that have previously been under ERTE. Thus, [the NH hotel chain announced in mid-February of 2021 that they were planning to carry out an employment regulation plan](#) (ERE) in which they planned to lay off around seven hundred people in their central services, especially in Madrid and Barcelona, although this company has previously benefited from public aid through the ERTE mechanism. The unions, on the other hand, have denounced this as an operation [to hire cheaper staff](#), taking advantage of the economic situation. Another similar example, also in mid-February of 2021, involves the Iberostar group, in its travel division, World2meet (W2M). It ended the ERTE with an agreement with the trade unions to implement [an ERE involving 246 redundancies](#), compared to the 299 initially announced by the company, and of which [167 will be concentrated in the Balearic Islands](#) the most affected area. Around the same time, another large intermediary company, Logitravel, [announced an ERE in three of its affiliates](#) which could affect between 300 and 400 employees.

In cities such as **Barcelona**, where tourism has a special weight in the economy, the loss of employment in this sector is clearly on the rise. According to sources from the Department of Labour of the Generalitat de Catalunya, [systematized by the Observatori de Turisme a Barcelona](#), in the third quarter of 2020 Social Security registrations decreased by 16.4% compared to the same period of the previous year, with 16,525 fewer registrations. Similarly, during the month of September of 2020, the number of accumulated contracts decreased by 72.4% compared to the data for the same month in 2019.

**Job cuts have been widespread in the various sectors of tourism:** accommodation services, food, entertainment, tourist attractions, travel and information management, transport, and even in cultural institutions such as museums, where, [according to a survey by the International Council of Museums](#) (ICOM) a huge number of dismissals have been registered. Episodes such as those experienced by cruise ship crew members, who [for months were unable to return to their homes and remained locked up on the ships in a situation of maximum health risk](#), show the most extreme face of this situation. Contrary to the apologetic speeches of the industry and its lobbies, **the current crisis has confirmed that tourism employment is a disposable resource**, which companies can easily discard when they need it.

This situation **has affected most severely those groups of workers who were in the most precarious employment situation**, which has led to an [increase in inequality](#). The destruction of employment has been concentrated since the beginning of the pandemic in [temporary employment](#), which is the most vulnerable, [as shown by the Labour Force Survey](#) (EPA) with data from the fourth quarter of 2020. In the last fortnight of March of 2020, [more than two-thirds of the 900,000 jobs lost were temporary](#). Its impact has been particularly strong [among immigrants, women](#) and young people, who occupy the worst positions in the labour market. Regarding young people, in recent years it has been the group with the highest rates of involuntary part-time work, which means being able to work fewer hours than desired, [according to a study by the Social Observatory of La Caixa](#). Furthermore, over the last year, the destruction of employment has occurred to a greater extent among the youngest workers. Thus, according to data from the Labour Force Survey, [the loss of employment has been four times higher among the under 25s than in the country as a whole](#).

In addition to job losses, the current crisis has also resulted in a **decline in wages**, particularly affecting those who were already earning less and were worse positioned in the labour market. This is shown by [a Eurostat study on the impact of the pandemic on labour income](#). In the case of Spain, in 2020, those with the lowest incomes received 10% less compared to the previous year, in contrast to those with the highest salaries, who received only around 2% less. Similarly, young people, between 24 and 39 years old, are the ones who have seen their wages reduced the most, as well as suffering the greatest cuts in the number of working hours, [according to a report by the opinion polling company 40db](#), based on a survey of 1,000 people

between 16 and 75 years old in Spain. On the other hand, there is also a risk of [an increase in the wage gap between men and women](#), which, according to UGT data, is generally above 23%, with a decrease of 3 points that brings the difference back to the 2013 levels. This could be explained by the fact that women are employed in highly female-dominated sectors with lower salaries, such as hotels and catering, accommodation and commerce. Somehow, the economic situation also encourages employers to apply wage reductions that they would not have previously ventured to do. For example, [the Globalia group imposed wage reductions of up to 30% on Air Europa staff](#), even though it has received loans from the state through the *Sociedad Estatal de Participaciones Industriales* (SEPI).

**Informal employment associated with tourism** has also been severely affected, making it more difficult for certain groups to survive. Thus, in cities such as Barcelona, with the fall in the number of tourists, street vendors, known as “manteros” in Spain, have found it impossible to make a living, and have moved on to harvesting fruit in the countryside or [collecting scrap metal](#), according to the Gremio de Recuperación de Cataluña, although there has also been a minority who have been able to work in better conditions in the [mask production](#).

The structural precariousness on which tourism is based increases the difficulties faced by workers in severe situations such as the current one. Low wages and the spread of non-standard forms of employment (temporary, part-time and outsourced contracts, among others) mean that there is little capacity for savings. The need to earn a living practically daily pushes many people to take greater health risks to meet their needs, or to work without enough safety measures. **The greater the precariousness of tourism workers, the greater their vulnerability, and this increases their risk, and that of society as a whole**, in the event of possible new health crises.

This whole process of job destruction and deterioration of working conditions has led to an increase in **the impoverishment and social exclusion of labour sectors traditionally associated with tourism**. The aggravation of the economic crisis, with no other sectors capable of generating equivalent employment, and greater pressure on public social protection services, in addition to pressing social problems such as housing, may lead to an acceleration of poverty and social exclusion dynamics. The COVID-19 pandemic comes at a time when the effects of the previous crisis in 2008 had not yet been resolved, with a high level of chronic poverty. In fact, [the](#)

[at-risk-of-poverty rate in Spain has not fallen below 20% of the population since 2007](#), according to data from the INE's Living Conditions Survey. Moreover, the incidence of in-work poverty in Spain has also got worse. Severe poverty already affects more than 5 million people in Spain, according to a [research by Oxfam](#), which [is aggravated by the weak level of spending in terms of social protection](#), one of the lowest in the European Union. A study carried out by economists from the Complutense University of Madrid and the University of Oxford identifies that [the poverty rate in Spain could increase by 10 points, from 25 to 35 per cent, but with a greater incidence in the autonomous communities that depend most on tourism](#), such as the Canary Islands (14 points) and the Balearic Islands (19).

Currently, the labour market cannot guarantee a decent job to a growing number of employed people, resulting in the violation of basic needs and rights (FOESSA, 2020). As a result, in recent months [there has been a sharp increase in requests for assistance in Social Services from people with a precarious worker profile](#), especially those linked to the hotel, catering and commerce sectors. In the case of the Balearic Islands, one of the most touristic communities, with around 35% of GDP from this activity, the distribution by the Red Cross of basic aid, which includes food, personal hygiene and household cleaning products, [has increased from 11,000 in 2019 to 52,000 in the first ten months of 2020](#). In tourist cities, especially those that were built according to Fordist logics linked to the international market with strong links to large tour operators, this dependence on a single type of activity is very high and can involve high risk. For example, [in Catalonia, unemployment is particularly acute in tourist coastal towns](#) and their prospects for recovery are [much worse than in other regions](#) with greater economic diversification and industrial activity. The difference between tourist territories and territories with tourism is currently being seen clearly, as in the first ones the crisis in tourist employment has structural effects that go beyond the socio-labour sphere, while in the second ones the impact, even though it may be serious, is more of a sectoral nature (Borràs, 2020). Thus, we cannot exclude the possibility that we may witness a similar cycle to the one that occurred with the de-industrialization of emblematic cities such as Detroit or Flint in the United States after the failure of automobile production. Will this be the fate of Mediterranean coastal towns such as Salou, Calvià or Lloret de Mar, [whose population is increasingly forced to rely on food aid to survive](#)? Or of places such as



Los Cristianos, in the township of Arona, in the south-west of Tenerife, [which has already been abandoned](#), with practically no shops?

Governments in different countries have set up **social protection mechanisms for tourism workers**, with greater intensity in some cases than in others. In Spain, [the impact of the crisis on employment has been significantly reduced](#) thanks to the Temporary Redundancy Programmes (Temporary Employment Regulation Files - ERTE). As a result, some workers have been able to receive a benefit from the state that covers a significant part of what was their salary while the activity ceases. In the middle of confinement, the number of people in ERTE in Spain reached 3.6 million (23% of workers) and relatively speaking the highest proportions were concentrated in the two archipelagos characterized by their tourist hyper-specialization (the Balearic Islands with 38.6% of their workers in ERTE and the Canary Islands with 37.1%). In December of 2020, the number dropped to 755,613. The majority were concentrated in the food and beverage and accommodation sectors. The difficulty in relaunching the tourism cycle due to the persistence of the pandemic has forced the extension of the ERTes until the end of May 2021, while waiting for the progress of the vaccination to allow the tourist season to recover. However, access to these social protection instruments has been different depending on the position occupied in the previously existing labour hierarchy. As the sector has been structurally predominantly based on precarious work (Cañada, 2019), the effect has been that those **with the worst employment conditions**, with part-time or temporary contracts, under outsourcing processes, or as self-employed, [have had greater difficulties in accessing this type of aid](#), and in the case of discontinuous permanent workers, it has depended on the territories.

Despite the importance of support policies for workers, these have major limitations given the profound labour transformations characterized by the growing precariousness of the labour market. In this sense, those who were subject to temporary and precarious contracts, and even more so those working in the informal economy, have not been able to take advantage of this type of benefits. This has had a particular gender bias because the worst employment conditions are mostly concentrated among women, particularly if variables of race, age and social class origin are also considered (Moreno and Cañada, 2018). The most precarious and vulnerable groups in society are those most exposed to the crisis: without access or with limited access

to public health care, with insufficient social benefits, forced to seek other means of support, and increasing levels of poverty (ILO, 2020).

Even if there is a universal vaccine that once again facilitates international mobility and, on the other hand, domestic tourism is promoted, the recovery of tourism activity, in the short and medium-term, will hardly reach the existing volumes before the great crisis of 2020. This means that, in the struggle for survival in an adverse general context, with a smaller tourism market and “[fierce competition](#)”, in the words of **Marta Blanco**, president of the Tourism Council of the Spanish Confederation of Business Organisations (CEOE), one of the options companies will use, as they have traditionally done, will be to increase pressure to reduce labour costs. This path can be facilitated by a labour market that is favourable to job devaluation. Thus, the increase in unemployment and impoverishment can accentuate the competition between workers to get a job, or, for fear of losing their jobs, [they may accept reductions in rights and intensify the dynamics of self-exploitation](#). This fear would have spread widely in the current situation, [as revealed by a recent survey](#) on working conditions, insecurity and health in the context of COVID-19 by the Research Group on Psychosocial Risks, Work Organisation and Health (POWAH) of the Autonomous University of Barcelona and the Trade Union Institute of Work, Environment and Health (ISTAS) of *Comisiones Obreras*. The pandemic and the subsequent crisis would be acting under the disciplinary scheme known as the “shock doctrine”, popularized by the Canadian journalist **Naomi Klein** (2010).

Another factor to consider is the fact that **the current situation is not very favourable for the negotiation of collective agreements to benefit workers’ interests and needs**. According to data from *Comisiones Obreras*, at the end of 2020, out of 53 provincial and regional collective agreements in the hospitality sector in Spain, affecting 1,259,483 people, 31 were in force (704,296 people), 11 were under negotiation (369,719) and 11 more were unsigned (185,468). The 11 unsigned agreements have been blocked for years due to the employers’ lack of interest, as in the case of Valencia (affecting 61,081 workers), Murcia (32,595) or Asturias and A Coruña (with just over 23,000 workers in each case). Among those under negotiation, the most important case was that of **Catalonia**, which affected 193,894 workers, and which expired on the 31<sup>st</sup> of December of 2019. This case was particularly important because if no agreement had been reached, the legal framework of reference for workers in the sector as of 1 January of 2021 would have been the Workers’ Statute,



with significantly worse conditions. The lack of an ultra-activity clause in the agreement, unlike the majority, in which it was included under union pressure, meant that, in the event of non-renewal, instead of the last agreed conditions remaining in force, the reference would become that of the Workers' Statute, which means a substantial loss of acquired rights. Eventually, [in the final days of the year, an agreement was reached](#). The two unions represented at the negotiating table, UGT and CCOO, accepted the extension of the previous collective agreement for two years (2020-2021), maintaining the wage tables of 2019 and the elimination of own business days for 2021, with no other major changes. Until the last moment, there was the possibility that the lack of agreement would lead to a worsening of a collective agreement that already suffered from clear limitations, and which in its last negotiation was only signed by UGT on the trade union side, while CCOO rejected it. In this context, under the threat that it could still have been much worse, very precarious conditions are consolidated which do not change anything regarding outsourcing, one of the major demands of the last few years, particularly concerning hotel chambermaids and the various associations of “kellys”.

In the next few years, most agreements in Spain will have to be negotiated, including those in Madrid (199,055 workers), Las Palmas (74,054), Malaga (62,673), Alicante (59,612) and the Balearic Islands (39,794), while those in Valencia and Murcia, mentioned above, are still pending, among others. In this context, it is easy to assume that trade union organizations will find it very difficult to achieve improvements, which are necessary for the current situation, and that at best they will be able to maintain the current framework.

On top of this, there is the employers' refusal to agree on relevant changes in labour matters, for example, the demand for an [increase in the Minimum Interprofessional Wage](#) (SMI) or [changes in key aspects of the labour reform](#), as well as the fact that European reconstruction funds [may be conditioned by the European Commission's demands](#) on pensions or the labour reform itself, which puts pressure on the labour market with a new twist.

Despite the crisis, not all businesses are experiencing the situation in the same way. Some corporations linked to platform economies, such as those that buy, collect and transport orders over short distances using delivery drivers without a clear employment relationship with these companies, have increased their position in many cities. Bars and restaurants are increasingly dependent on this type of service,

and are even [threatened with very high commissions](#) from these delivery companies [when they are not simply replaced by ‘dark kitchens’](#), hidden kitchens dedicated to preparing meals for home delivery services, which [are spreading especially in cities such as Madrid or Barcelona](#). We are witnessing a loss of the centrality of waiters and waitresses and growing prominence of delivery workers or “riders”, in conditions of greater deregulation, lower wages, without social protection, forced to work assuming risks to their health, [extremely vulnerable](#), and who have come to be considered as [the reference working class of our time](#). Also, to their regret, they are the **symbol of a cultural defeat**, the defeat of the popular classes who, in the context of an evident degradation of the working conditions of a growing collective, are incapable of imposing a basic common sense of not consuming in this type of companies. On the other hand, not only some of these companies are acquiring greater weight in the tourism economy, but also their structures are light enough to completely disengage from part of their value chain, as is the case with large platforms for the commercialization of tourist accommodation, such as Airbnb, both for properties they do not own and for activities considered non-core (Cañada, 2020).

The current crisis also seems to be accelerating the processes of digitalization and robotization, which can generate fundamental changes in work organization. Thus, for example, the front desk staff may be replaced by technological resources in some of their processes, [such as reservations, transfers, check-in, check-out, room check-in or invoicing](#), which will allow staff to be reduced and the remaining staff to be redirected towards customer information and prescriptive services. Likewise, check-in work in tourist accommodation was already being largely replaced by digital mechanisms for opening and accessing accommodation. However, some tasks that are not easily replaceable technologically, or it is not profitable to do so, because of the costs involved, in a context of dependency on scarce minerals in the different devices used, or because labour costs are already significantly low through the impact on forms of recruitment, such as cleaning tasks. But technological and, above all, organizational changes can also be very relevant in this type of tasks that require significant physical effort, and [although they can be presented as a way of optimizing internal procedures or increasing the safety of certain workers](#), they rather imply an increase in control over the actual work that leads to a kind of [robotization of human work processes](#).

Another major change in work organization that has occurred as a consequence of health restrictions in many activities has been the **promotion of teleworking as a strategy to reduce infection risks**. In tourism, due to the importance of physical presence and interaction with the customer, this does not seem to have had a similar dimension to the one that may have occurred in other sectors. However, when it has occurred, especially in large companies, such as in the commercial department, reservations and administration in hotels, or in the management of company accounts in large travel agencies, it seems to reproduce the same problems that have been described in other areas: regulation limitations, despite some significant changes, such as the recent [Royal Decree-Law 28/2020 of September 22, 2020, on teleworking](#); means of production provided directly by the employees; insufficient effective control over schedules; greater obstacles to the collective organization; reconciliation difficulties; and, lastly, a higher incidence among women, [who run the risk of becoming a new “return to the home”](#). However, in other activities that could have been organized remotely, such as customer information services, widely outsourced through call centres, it does not appear that they have been widely transferred to the private homes of their workers, due to corporate resistance to losing control over these work processes.

Everything seems to indicate that we are facing a “**perfect storm**” that may lead **to more precarious tourist work in an uncertain scenario and greater social tension**.

### The big greenwashing moment

With our eyes fixed on last-minute events, we tend to lose the analytical capacity that requires more composure and a long memory. Therefore, in this overwhelming amount of information, it is worth remembering the recent global capitalist shake-up in response to the financial crisis that began in 2008 and what the political solutions to the crisis were. Back then, in the early days of the crisis, global elites gathered at the G20 or the Davos Forum called for a re-founding of capitalism and even an end to tax havens. However, these fireworks lasted truly little time and, fundamentally, **the governments dedicated their efforts to rescue the financial institutions that had been clogged with toxic assets**. After these bailouts, which were carried out by increasing public debt, the financial capital that had been at the core of the bubble

began to speculate on public debt. These moves led governments to adopt an **austerity agenda characterized by cuts in public spending and privatizations of public goods and services**. The result was a significant increase in inequality and social vulnerability (Lapavitsas and Fkassbeck 2015). The political interpretation of this crisis outcome was obvious, as were the interpretations that can be made of the solutions applied in the Global South to the successive crises since the 1980s. **The message is that debts are paid, and that debt is one of the most powerful political weapons for deepening accumulation by planetary dispossession** (Graeber, 2012).

Analysing the different policy responses to the COVID-19 crisis would undoubtedly go beyond the scope of this chapter. However, to complete the picture of our analysis we must consider some of the main lines of policy action. **The adopted policies can be classified according to their spatial-temporal framework, their scope of action -health, economic, social-, and their orientation -survival and rescue, recovery-**. Briefly, we will identify the characteristics of each of these policy lines of action.

In the first place, we can highlight the **health response at the beginning of the pandemic**. At that time, policies were highly inconsistent, and they differed significantly from country to country. The first group of countries, mainly in Southeast Asia, implemented early confinement, (digital) population control and severe travel restrictions. The second group followed similar strategies to those of the Southeast Asian countries but without the social discipline of those countries, which, like New Zealand, managed to almost eradicate the disease. Subsequently, after these countries implemented travel restrictions, these were expanded globally. The third group of countries with relatively strong public health systems, such as Germany, chose to address the disease with selective rather than strict confinement measures, social distancing and increased health deployment (e.g., PCR testing). The fourth group of countries, such as Spain or Argentina, had precarious and vulnerable public health systems and adopted severe confinement measures when the pandemic began to run out of control. Lastly, there is a group of countries with very precarious public health systems that led their authorities' denialist delusions about the coronavirus, including Nicaragua, Brazil and the United States.

When it seemed that the “first wave” incidence was beginning to subside, new health responses began to be deployed to control the virus and, above all, to re-

activate the circuit of accumulation to establish a “new normality” - business as usual. Thus, in uneven global distribution, once the enormous pressure on hospital resources of the “first wave” was over and after the production and distribution of medical supplies were deployed, health measures began to be implemented, from the widespread use of masks to mass testing for COVID-19, so that immediate action could be taken. However, the tests and associated epidemiological monitoring required financial resources and personnel, which was almost impossible in states that had been devastated by austerity policies. Thus, in the post-first-wave stage, the huge management gaps in the global management of the coronacrisis were once again replicated.

Under multiple **pressures to reactivate the tourist circuit**, Europe took the lead in easing travel restrictions. In the case of [EU](#) member states, the measures and criteria for lifting restrictions and managing visitor flow depended on each country. While it was initially suggested that travel would require PCR testing and/or quarantine, both at the destination and upon arrival in the country of origin, these measures were soon discarded. They were too restrictive for the reactivation of the tourism cycle. On the other hand, [competition was triggered from different countries to see who could attract European tourists first](#), using formulas such as “bubble corridors” or “tourist corridors”. In the Spanish case, the first “[tourist corridor](#)” was established between Germany and the Balearic Islands. It was assumed that travel between areas with a low incidence of COVID would be allowed. However, shortly after the reactivation of the tourist cycle, there was an increase in cases of COVID in Spanish tourist areas, which led [European countries to increase measures and restrictions on travelling to Spain](#). By the middle of August, the [tourist season](#) was over. After the summer 2020 fiasco, the [European Commission](#) developed several common measures to deal with travel in EU member states already in October 2020, including [COVID-19 risk mapping](#) based on which member states would establish appropriate measures and restrictions. However, the second and third waves of the pandemic entailed greater travel restrictions. Beyond quarantines and PCR tests, all expectations for the reactivation of the tourist circuit rely on [at least 70% of the population being vaccinated by the summer of 2021](#). In any case, the vaccination process is being severely slowed down, mainly due to the evil mercantile logic of pharmaceutical corporations and their patents (Plaza, 2021). In fact, [most of the vaccine doses](#) have been purchased by the countries of advanced capitalism, leaving

aside the Global South, which Winnie Byanyima (2021) has defined as a “vaccine apartheid”. However, given the overwhelming proof that the questionable and slow progress of vaccination is because it is subject to the violence of capital, [tourist lobbies](#) point to public mismanagement as the only cause and suggest more private action as the solution.

In response to the pandemic outbreak and to cope with the economic shock of confinement, a whole series of **shock-absorbing and rescue policies** were put in place. Initially, the major central banks - the United States, the European Union, the United Kingdom and Japan - launched **quantitative easing (QE) programmes**, while the [People’s Bank of China](#) chose a policy focused on lowering interest rates, renegotiating loans, injecting liquidity subject to medium-term loans instead of buying bonds. The other main pillar of QE is the reduction of interest rates to historic minimums. The liquidity injections total astronomical amounts: the [Federal Reserve](#), after the first operation of two trillion dollars, announced that no limits would be set to quantitative easing, standing at around 7.4 trillion dollars in February 2021. On the other hand, the European Central Bank launched the Pandemic Emergency Purchase Programme for 750 billion euros, [expanded to 1.85 trillion euros](#). The [Bank of England](#) injected 895 billion pounds, or the [Bank of Japan](#) announced unlimited purchases of public debt and corporate bonds. In theory, these operations should, among other things, provide liquidity to governments to meet crisis expenses, inject liquidity into financial institutions to boost credit, support the corporate value of companies in a loss-making scenario, lower the value of currencies and stimulate exports. However, one of the main consequences of QE policy is a rise in stock prices, which fuels the stock market bubble (Dolack, 2020).

While the central banks have overseen activating the monetary helicopter, among other measures in the advanced capitalism countries, **the International Monetary Fund** and the **World Bank** have played a special role in the countries of the Global South, by extending financial resources and suspending debt service payments. As the IMF argues, the coronacrisis will lead to the largest debt in the history of capitalism (IMF, 2020). Hence, **the economic crisis cushion policies carry crushing debts into the future**. If the same logic as in the past is applied, the social costs of dealing with the largest debt in history could not only prolong the crisis but also



trigger powerful socio-political turbulence. Indeed, two IMF reports published in October 2020 and January 2021 [warned of a possible global wave of social outbursts](#) within a maximum of two years after the end of the pandemic.

To avoid the suffering that the debt will cause, different groups expressed their support for debt cancellation. However, when [European economists called for debt cancellation](#), Christine Lagarde, president of the ECB, categorically responded that [it is inconceivable that the ECB would write off the debt linked to COVID-19](#).

Among the cushioning and rescue policies are those **measures aimed at mitigating the effects of the crisis in terms of job destruction and income security for the people and groups most affected by the pandemic**. These types of policies vary widely and unevenly across the world. Its implementation has much to do with two factors: on the one hand, the strength of public policies on employment and social protection before the outbreak of the pandemic. And, on the other hand, the specific characteristics of the labour market according to the degree of formality/informality, according to contractual characteristics, etc. An example of this type of policy is the European Commission's [SURE](#) (Temporary Support Instrument for Mitigating the Risks of Unemployment in an Emergency), a fund of 100 billion euros in the form of loans to member states to cover the effects of the crisis on employment. The two main countries that have made use of the SURE are Italy (27.4 billion euros) and Spain (21.3 billion euros). Again, this instrument will also generate debt and the [main holders of social bonds](#) are currently large investment funds, insurance companies and retirement funds. Spain is an example of the application of this type of policy, through the application of the so-called ERTE (Expediente de Regulación Temporal del Empleo) explained above.

In addition to the social protection policies indicated above, the governments of different countries around the world have deployed measures to support companies, such as tax deferrals and/or reductions, moratoriums on the payment of social security contributions, direct aid in the form of loans and tax reductions, among the main ones<sup>3</sup>. As tourism is one of the most affected sectors by the crisis, a large part of the rescue and cushioning policies make specific reference to tourism, which is not the case for other sectors. The [European Commission](#) is a clear example of this. In the field of tourism, the measures adopted have gone in different directions. On

3 In the case of EU member states, it is recommended to consult this [European Commission](#) website. In the specific case of tourism (although it does not cover all the world countries) you can consult the [UNWTO](#) website.



the one hand, direct aid from governments to rescue companies such as [TUI in Germany](#) or [Globalia in Spain](#). As for the demands for tax reductions by corporations, the policies applied have ranged from Donald Trump's tax cuts for large companies (Dolack, 2020) to VAT reductions in various EU countries for restaurant, entertainment and tourism activities. In addition to including tourism in the overall rescue packages - for example, the ERTes in Spain where the catering and accommodation sector accounted for [60% of the workers](#) in this situation - and direct aid to companies, specific plans have been deployed. For example, the [German plan with 840 million euros](#), mainly aimed at meeting the demands for ticket refunds and holiday packages, or the [rescue plan for the Spanish hotel and tourism sector](#) with 4200 million euros, have been deployed.

Lastly, there are **recovery policies**. In this context, COVID-19 has triggered a global crisis that was already predicted and has served as a pretext for launching large-scale capital restructuring programmes. Thus, it has been said that a “Marshall Plan” (Kozul-Wright, 2020) should be launched to deal with the coronacrisis. Moreover, the crisis outbreak has become linked to the demands for the decarbonisation of capitalism as a result of climate emergency. In this sense, even before the pandemic and from different political approaches, the so-called *Green New Deal* was already being demanded (Klein, 2019). Thus, a good part of the recovery plans of the main powers is rhetorically based on two axes: sustainability and digitalization. As the Climate Action Tracker shows, based on the analysis of the COVID-19 recovery policy packages of five major greenhouse gas producers - China, the EU, India, South Korea and the US - it turns out that most of the bailout programmes were not environmentally qualified. Or, despite the environmental rhetoric, we found that most of the items were not subject to environmental conditionalities (CAT, 2020).

Probably one of the paradigmatic examples of the **green shift in rescue packages** is the EU's. COVID-19 has been used to deploy a wide-ranging policy package to guide the restructuring of European capital aimed at resituating the European power in the post-pandemic international order. In May 2020, the **European Commission** presented the package [Next Generation EU](#) (NGEU) with 750 billion euros plus 1.07 trillion euros from the Multiannual Financial Framework. Member states will have to formulate recovery and resilience plans, of which around 30% should be allocated to green projects and 20% to digitalization. Beyond the rhetoric, everything seems to indicate that large fossil capital companies - including tourism companies - will

be the main beneficiaries of these measures (Pérez, 2020). In particular, [the large Spanish tourism companies have joined forces to capture 5.8 billion](#) euros from the Next Generation EU to be used for the supposed transformation towards green and smart tourism, plus another two billion euros for refurbishment requested by [Meliá, Barceló, Riu and Iberostar](#) for the renovation of twelve mature tourist areas. Along with green rescue policies, there have also been other policies that are precisely the opposite, as in the United States, where Trump took advantage of the pandemic to eliminate or reduce environmental protection laws (Holden, 2020) or in the case of Spain, where different regional governments have reduced environmental regulations (Tena, 2020). Among the tourism recovery efforts, in addition to direct packages, it seems that digital control mechanisms will play an increasingly important role - bar-coded tourists-, [QR-code](#) readings for supposedly biomedical control of customers, as well as digital monitoring of work, which may lead to increased exploitation.

In the end, these are measures that support large corporations and the greening of capitalism but leave the causes of the pandemic - the biodiversity crisis - untouched. As Andreas Malm (2020) argues, it seems that the **reformist agenda comes too late in a situation of chronic emergency**. It is, therefore, necessary to rethink and reformulate how to act politically, from emancipatory positions, to resist the effects of COVID-19 and collectively organize ourselves in a world crossed by the concatenation of emergencies.

### Perspectives to overcome the crisis, also from the tourism sector

The touristification processes have given place to an enormous social vulnerability that has been increased by COVID-19. As a result, **we are facing a time of historical change in which we can expect an even greater social degradation than we experienced before the pandemic**, unless there is sufficient capacity for organization and social resistance to prevent it and reverse the process. In the short term, the outlook is bleak. This crisis has multiple overlapping dimensions that require different responses. Firstly, it is necessary to react to the growing impoverishment and social exclusion processes. Secondly, there is an urgent need to set limits to the financial and corporate power that increases the social inequalities that generate the existing precarious dynamics. Lastly, a political proposal must be developed to im-

plement a socio-ecological transition programme, considering the concept of limits, which will make us less vulnerable than the current models of touristification, which are particularly intense in important areas of the Spanish geography.

Undoubtedly, the response to the current situation goes far beyond tourism. It requires **a global political intervention of a post-capitalist nature to put a brake on the current neoliberal disorder** and the dead-end that most of humanity is heading towards. But at the same time, tourism is a core part of the current capitalist economy, and we need a political perspective to influence its transformation. Keeping this broad dimension in mind, at the end of this text, **our purpose is to outline some ideas that can contribute to the elaboration of a programme of post-capitalist intervention in the field of tourism**. We do so from emancipatory perspectives, that is, with the moral purpose of eliminating any form of oppression or domination and, at the same time, promoting an expansion of human capacities that will allow a decent life in a fair society in peace with the planet (Goulet, 1995; Wright, 2014).

The main difficulty we encounter when trying to construct proposals for transforming tourism from left-wing positions is that we have little experience in this specific area, unlike in other areas, such as education, health or employment, where it is easier for us to identify our policy proposals. So far, the left, in its various expressions and traditions, has mainly focused on the response to the impacts of the tourist model. Dealing with the dispossession and exploitation processes has not been easy, and we owe much to this social, neighbourhood and trade union resistance. Without it, the scenario would be much worse. At the same time, when some expressions of the political left have reached certain spaces of institutional power, they have done it lacking enough social strength and clear ideas about which tourism policies to promote. With greater or smaller capacity and intention, they have tried to set certain limits to the practices of “free bar” and dictation by which the tourism business community and its lobbies have acted on our public institutions.

As we have seen above, the prevailing political action in moments of crisis associated with tourism has been aimed at mitigating some of its social effects, but, above all, it has tried to promote the rescue and recovery of the business sector, both directly and indirectly. This means committing an enormous amount of resources, which will lead to a new [debt crisis](#), which in global terms is already at peaks [equivalent to those generated in the Second World War](#). We will end up paying for this debt with a new wave of austerity policies. It seems that they are trying to bring us

back to the pre-disaster situation, under the same logic that led us to it. Thus, the policy risks that are currently being outlined to address the tourism crisis are clear: accentuating the existing model of vulnerability; squandering public resources destined for large corporations; increasing public debt; leaving the most disadvantaged social sectors out of social protection mechanisms in a model that is structurally based on precariousness; and, lastly, and consequently, reinforcing inequality.

In response to this situation, from emancipatory perspectives defending the needs and rights of broad majorities, there is an urgent need to formulate a specific tourism policy that integrates and contributes to a broad programme of socio-ecological transition of a post-capitalist nature. This implies a shift in the way tourism has traditionally been understood by the political left. While tourism constitutes a mechanism for the commodification of relations and spaces to serve the accumulation and reproduction of capital, it can also be understood and implemented as a way of satisfying human needs and capacities, generating wellbeing, health, recreation, and even education and critical thinking. If we normalize and essentialize only the negative consequences of tourism, we are in danger of losing the capacity to think about transforming tourism and disconnecting ourselves from the needs of all those people who depend on it and who, in some cases, aim to pursue their professional careers with dignity in this type of activity. Rather, what we need to do is **to understand the flexible nature of tourism, as a social construction, the realities depending on the forms of organization, management and objectives to which it responds and, therefore, to commit ourselves to its transformation under other logics**. This political conviction has little to do with the naïve visions that have proliferated in recent months, which see the crisis as an opportunity to “make everything better” and emerge stronger from the current situation, as if it were a problem of a simple will, or of not having noticed the problems we had before, without considering the tourism’s political economy and the power relations at play. On the other hand, what we are proposing is the need to **articulate a political action programme that requires social and political organisation and fight to seriously address the transformation of an activity such as tourism, which is at the heart of today’s capitalism**. The present situation requires that social resistance to the dynamics of dispossession and exploitation resulting from touristification, and the will for transformation, can simultaneously advance.

What criteria could guide the formulation of tourism policies in an emancipatory direction? As in many other areas of political action, the guidelines for action are multiple and necessary at the same time. That is **social resistance to the different expressions of dispossession and exploitation; political intervention to regulate, control and propose; and, finally, the construction of other forms of tourism development, under other logics and objectives than those of the reproduction of capital.**

In specific terms, a programme of post-capitalist intervention in tourism could contain the following guidelines:

First, we must promote and reinforce **social protection mechanisms focused on tourism workers**, not at the corporations' service. The methods can be different and complementary, but we must ensure that they also effectively reach those who were subjected to the most precarious forms of employment, with temporary, part-time or outsourced contracts, because this precariousness was not accidental. On the contrary, this was a structural component of the functioning of tourism companies as a cost-cutting mechanism. The experience of measures such as the ERTE, despite their importance for some of the sector's employees, clearly shows their limitations by excluding another part, specifically the most disadvantaged.

Given the social emergency triggered by the crisis, different opinions have been expressed for a universal basic income (UBI), ranging from degrowth positions (Barca et al., 2020) to those coming from orthodox economics (Duffo and Abhijt, 2020). However, the UBI should not be confused with initiatives such as the Minimum Vital Income ([IMV](#)), aimed at the most vulnerable groups, something like an income for the poor (Raventós, 2020). Currently, the UBI can be one of the main political tools for social transformation in a post-COVID world.

In addition to economic support measures, it would be necessary to activate a training plan that would allow the transition of these workers to other activity sectors to be promoted, based on the recognition and accreditation of their skills and increasing their chances of finding employment in other activities.

In the second place, it would be necessary **to strengthen social resistance to the damage caused by tourist capital**. This implies a wide variety of intervention areas and social organizations involved in the trade union, environmental, neighbourhood, anti-tourist, housing, cooperative or feminist movements, among others. After the tourism industry has been paralyzed by the pandemic, its reactivation may

lead to particularly aggressive dynamics to recover lost profits or to survive in an extremely competitive environment. The labour sector is where the greatest impact may occur, with an increase in precariousness and loss of rights. The role of trade unions is essential in this context, especially in a sector with a traditionally low level of organization, and with some sub-sectors with no presence at all, beyond hotels and travel agencies. But given this situation, trade unions must also change their strategy to effectively address and incorporate a broad social base that is increasingly precarious and vulnerable, which does not establish links with workers and companies as they could in the past, and which have been in the traditional social base of trade unionism. It is not only a matter of fighting against precariousness, without taking these same workers seriously enough into account, but also of giving protagonism and providing new forms of organization and participation that include increasingly larger precarious collectives. The future of trade unionism is at stake among these sectors.

Furthermore, other forms of aggression by tourism capital can be deployed in different areas such as, for example, environmental protection to promote investment in protected areas or the reduction of climate commitments to stimulate tourism recovery. Another area where pressure is also being applied is in the reduction of tax burdens on tourism companies. In touristified societies, lowering taxes on these companies implies an increase in social vulnerability, as it reduces the means of financing the social resources that can help to mitigate critical situations such as the current one.

The post-pandemic outlook is likely to make social, environmental, neighbourhood and trade union movements an essential actor to confront the new logics of touristification.

In the third place, **it would be necessary to promote a tourism policy that would respond to the needs and rights of broad majorities, and that could be sustained from institutional spheres with the complicity, although from the absolute autonomy, of social movements.** This policy must necessarily contemplate different perspectives. Thus, a central element **should be not to accentuate the existing touristification and, therefore, to avoid any attempt to return to previous situations without being questioned, evaluated and conditioned.** Tourism cannot have the same importance it had until now, or at least not in the most touristic areas. This implies not mortgaging more public resources to reactivate a sector that makes



us more vulnerable. Therefore, it is necessary to plan a voluntary degrowth in some places, although it may grow in other places where tourism has played a marginal role. At the same time, it means thinking about tourism in a broader framework of diversification and economic complementarity. It is also imperative to enhance **public control mechanisms at different levels - fiscal, labour and urban planning - over the operation of companies in the sector**. To achieve this, it is essential to develop a policy of **social and ecological conditions for any type of public aid related to tourism**. Moreover, public policies to support the sector can become an enormous mechanism for privatization of public resources and this also requires specific knowledge, monitoring capacity and commitment to share information with social movements.

But at the same time, in the field of intervention by public institutions, **tourism policies must be reformulated to serve the broad majorities**, considering the biophysical limits of the planet. This implies conceiving tourism as a mechanism that contributes to human capacity development. There are many ways to do this, such as promoting access to nearby natural areas in proper conditions; [reinforcing social tourism policies](#) supporting Social Solidarity Economy (SSE) initiatives; promoting [proximity-based tourism](#), which for climatic and social reasons can be more resilient; and promoting public transportation policies that encourage more environmentally friendly mobility associated with tourism.

Under capitalism, any economic activity is conditioned by the dominant logics of accumulation and reproduction of capital, but we must focus on increasing the possibilities of organizing production and tourist consumption to escape from this hegemony. These are the **real utopias** mentioned by the American Marxist sociologist **Erik Olin Wright**. These are desirable, viable and feasible alternatives to advance towards a post-capitalist future. One of the expressions of emancipatory thinking, which is already seeking transformations, as a trial and learning process, but also to solve specific problems using other logics. We have examples, such as Sesc Bertioga in Brazil with more than seventy years in operation (Cañada, 2020), which can help to find new paths, but we also need to strengthen the research, dissemination and debate of multiple experiences that can inspire a new course.

The COVID-19 pandemic, and the crisis it is triggering, has questioned the current touristification model. The emerging risks are too serious for us not to try to intervene socially and politically. The current risks are too high, which is why it is



imperative to have a political proposal that will enable us to face the gravity of the times that are approaching. The main question now is how we make this transformation possible under post-capitalist perspectives. The possibility is not a given, it is settled in the dispute, in the specific social struggles that determine what tourist capital can do and, in the capacity, to sustain different ways of production and consumption. And therefore, it implies social actors, collectively organized, that resist and assert themselves by sustaining these desirable, viable and feasible alternatives with which to build a new horizon with hope.

# **LOCKDOWN NOTES: HOW HAVE WE GOT HERE?**

## THE VULNERABILITY OF TOURISM SPECIALISATION

Joan Moranta<sup>4</sup>

Traditionally, small business owners from the Balearic Islands', which were mainly farmers, would look at the sky to find out if the weather would be favourable for their crops. This occurred mostly before 1960, [when there were still about 65,000 farmers](#) and the economy depended on favourable weather conditions. [Currently there are less than 6,000 farmers in the Balearic Islands](#) -including farmers, foresters and fishermen. Sixty years after the beginning of an important economic transformation, driven by the expansion of the island's entry ports, entrepreneurs, now mainly dedicated to tourism and services sectors, still observe the skies. Despite the fact that today we live with our backs turned to nature. However, at present, we are not only aware of the weather, other external factors of different idiosyncrasies also affect us strongly, in such a way that the tourism specialization of the Balearic economy has not been accompanied by greater strength or less vulnerability of the system, [but the contrary](#). From September 2019 to March 2020, three events of different characteristics occurred shaking the foundations of the economic system, alerting, once again, the Balearic tourism sector in particular, and the society in general. A society that, unfortunately, is already accustomed to accounting for the challenges the tourism-business sector faces at the start of or end of every season as a result of potential insufficient reservations or due to the non-fulfilment of the expected profit expectations, respectively.

### Costs socialisation and benefits privatization

The three events, [the failure of Thomas Cook](#), the [storm Gloria](#) and [the COVID-19 disease](#) are distinct. The first, [a business crisis on a global scale](#), related to a highly dependent business-tourism policy on external, distant and opaque decisions. The second, a regional climate crisis, related to a global climate change clearly pointing at an increase in [both sea level](#) and frequency-intensity of [extreme storms](#). The

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third, a health crisis on a planetary scale, [related to globalization](#) and, consequently, a greater capacity to mobilize people and materials all over the world from one end to the other.

We are, precisely, interested in verifying the negative effects of these three catastrophic, unexpected and different incidents on the economy of the islands (and the world). All of them are very worrying because the socioeconomic consequences that they imply, that is, losses in millions of euro, a slowdown in the economy and a slump in employment, but also an increase in mortality as a result of the last two events. [The failure of Thomas Cook trapped some 600,000 tourists around the world](#). The storm had devastating impacts on the coast of the eastern Iberian Peninsula [with damage valued at more than 71 million €](#). The disease is having serious economic and job market repercussions around the world, such as the cancellation of the 2020 Mobile World Congress in Barcelona, [which would have had an expected economic revenue of 492 million € and 13,000 jobs creation](#). In all three events, regardless whether they are caused by poor business strategy or environmental phenomena, the tourism-business sector demands public intervention to mitigate losses, [following a strategy of socialization of costs and profit privatization](#), both favoured by Governments.

### **The failure of Thomas Cook**

The failure of the British tour operator Thomas Cook took place in September 2019 when the difficulties of the company to tackle its payments were confirmed, caused, in part, by the Brexit, which triggered a chain economic reaction. The *Federació Empresarial Hotelera de Mallorca* (FEHM) estimated a debt of 100 million €, the coach transport business estimated around 5 million losses and many workers of different companies were unemployed. But, apart from the economic debt and direct job losses, the failure affected thousands of users, jeopardized the reserves of the following season and compromised the connectivity of the *Son Sant Joan* airport in Mallorca with the main tourism markets, affecting more 350,000 accommodation units. Both, [the central and regional governments came to the rescue of the sector](#) trying to counteract the effects of the failure on companies and workers.

## The storm Gloria

The storm Gloria occurred in January 2020. It damaged the island's coastline, devastating beaches, [which had only regenerated from other storms](#), and destroyed other infrastructures on the coastline that were built and rebuilt for decades following wave damage. One of the indirect consequences suffered during the storm, suspending maritime transport for several days, [was the lack of perishable food in supermarkets](#), a fact which also highlights the precariousness of the food system of the archipelago. Restaurant owners and tourist entrepreneurs in the affected areas were quick to conclude that the economic consequences of the storm will be dire unless central and regional governments urgently fully repaired beaches and promenades necessary for the arrival of the year's first and vital tourists. While the damage to public infrastructures caused by the storm Gloria in the Balearic Islands exceeds 16 million €, much to the businessmen and mayors' discontent, the government in Madrid initially only wanted to dedicate 4.4 million for the refurbishing. The mayors of the municipalities of Mallorca most affected by the storm expressed their concern about the state of the coastline and demanded rapid solutions, [avoiding the mandatory environmental impact assessment reports](#), in order to commence the high tourist season in favourable conditions and avoiding landscape images that they describe as shameful and chaotic. [They claim to dedicate part of the Sustainable Tourism Tax to regenerating the spoiled coastline](#). It will be interesting to know the details of the actions that the governments (central and regional) will carry out to tackle the demands of the sector and what adaptation measures they will implement, considering the climate emergency declarations made by the institutions. According to scientists, [the loss of beaches and the retreat of the coastline will be more frequent with further significant damages throughout Spain](#).

## The COVID-19 disease

The COVID-19 disease, caused by a coronavirus originating in Wuhan (China), has already spread across five continents, infecting not only people but also markets. It arrived to Spain and the Balearic Islands between February and early March of 2020. Infections caused by this virus can also compromise tourist season bookings. In fact, the *Confederació d'Associacions Empresariales de Balears* (CAEB) has al-

ready expressed its concern about whether the coronavirus could affect the arrival of tourists to the islands in the coming months. They also urged the authorities and public administrations [to avoid making decisions not favouring proper economic development and job creation](#).

Indeed, CAEB also warns of the effects of the coronavirus aiding the current economic slowdown and the increase of unemployment. There have been many social events, congresses, cultural exhibitions and sports competitions that have been affected by the measures taken to avoid infection. For example, the ITB Berlin, scheduled in March 2020, has been cancelled and it is the largest tourism exhibition and the most important one for the Balearic Islands' tourism sector, where most of the reservations for the entire season are made. The concern of the FEHM and the *Agrupació de Cadenes Hoteleres de Balears* (ACH) is evident, and the Balearic Government and the *Consell de Mallorca* (CIM) have taken note and have been working hard trying to save the tourist season, [proposing and organizing alternative promotions for the islands](#). [The 6.7 million € that CIM has planned for tourism promotion over 2020 must be spent](#). In this case, the measures adopted at any level are very important to avoid infection of people and reduce mortality. The joining strategy followed among governments and the tourism-business sector is unusual, trying to convey the feeling of maximum tranquillity and control of the epidemic. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that, although it is possible to quarantine people, it is impossible to do the same [with markets and the deregulated economy](#).

## Priorities for change

The alarms, then, are triggered in form of “crisis” (business, climate, meteorological, health, food ...), and **it is becoming increasingly clear that we are in a situation of vulnerability and high risk**. Even so, to be able to face this situation, the priorities must be clear. We cannot continue with the same dynamic of trying to repair the damage, year after year, that maritime storms, which are increasing in intensity, will cause on infrastructures located where they should not be. In addition, the cause of the loss of sand on urban beaches does not have its origin only in the effects of storms. It has been repeatedly explained that this occurs because promenades and urbanizations are built over dune systems that in turn break the natural dynamics of these coastal ecosystems. Undoubtedly, [a new coastal planning is necessary](#), con-



sidering scenarios foreseen according to the predicted effects of climate change of rising sea level and retreating coastline. Most likely, any technological solution that proposes to put “walls” to the waves for continuing with the business-as-usual activities, in the long term, are more expensive than trying to move the infrastructure backwards. We cannot base the success of our economy only on [tourism promotion](#) either, dedicating more and more budget every year, trying to transmit tranquillity and confidence to the main tourism markets when something unforeseen arises. As we have seen in the case of the failure of Thomas Cook and the coronavirus pandemic, it does not guarantee avoiding the reduction of reservations nor cancellations, neither their effects on the economy. Our tourism model, based on the strategy of “the more the better” (more tourists, more flights, more cruises...) [has already expired and will never again be sustainable](#).

Due to the vulnerability of tourism specialization, [the urgent need for a change in the economic model](#) calls for responsibility of the whole society to be able to originate the political, economic and social transition. This is urgently needed for tackling the near future and forcing the present, not only to end the development of tourism industry and the policies promoting it but, above all, to plan a deliberate and conscious social agreement on a [tourism degrowth strategy](#) to avoid the coming ecological and social collapse. We can no longer afford to ignore the repercussions of high consumption levels of resources, materials and energy, nor generation of waste and greenhouse gas emissions or the significant social inequality that tourism causes. In conclusion, it is necessary to deactivate the globalisation, promote the local economy and gain resilience and sovereignty, [both for food and energy](#).

## CULTURAL SINGULARITY AS A CAUSE OF COVID-19 SPREAD IN SPAIN: A RESPONSE

Ivan Murray & Ernest Cañada<sup>5</sup>

At present, the avalanche of COVID –19 news is beyond overwhelming. There is not enough time to read what is being published and, at the same time, develop work tasks (those who, like us, telecommute), organise family life and take care (as far as possible) of our loved ones. Among news, arguments, and thoughts on the pandemic, we mainly find three voices. Firstly, some refer to an immediate and dramatic situation. Secondly, others intend to explain the mistakes or shortcomings regarding the crisis in the short term. Finally, others elaborate more profound reflections to understand how this situation has been reached.

### Cultural singularity once more

As it happened in 2008 when the financial crisis broke out, which in Spain was particularly intense due to the burst of the real estate bubble, the command centres of the European Union (EU) and its media indicated that Spaniards had lived beyond their means. Once the Central-European states began to emerge from the crisis around 2010, it was mentioned that the Southern countries, the so-called PIGS, a derogatory acronym to refer to Portugal, Italy, Greece, and Spain, did not do the same due to its propensity for laziness, *siesta*, and other customs little akin to the Protestant spirit of capital.

Until recently, we had not seen any interpretation of the reasons for the depth of the crisis in Spain compared to other EU states similar to those witnessed when the financial crisis erupted. Nonetheless, now there is an explanation of the reasons for the intense spread that we suffer in the article published in The Guardian, [How did Spain get its coronavirus response so wrong?](#), of last 26 March. In it, **Giles Tremlett**, a correspondent for the British newspaper in Spain, uses cultural roots as an explanatory factor for the rapid spread. Those could be synthesised in “Span-

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iards spend the day on bar terraces”, prioritising fun, socialisation (taking as an example the feminist demonstration of 8 March), and the culture of mass football with international matches celebrations, when there were already health warnings about COVID-19. Faced with these alleged singularities, it is worth mentioning that, for example, [the 8<sup>th</sup> of March demonstrations were held in many other European cities](#) or that [at the beginning of March international matches took place in many other countries](#) (for example, on 12 March the matches Lask-Manchester United; Frankfurt-Basel; Istanbul-Copenhagen; Olympiacos-Wolves); or that during the first weekend when the state of emergency was declared in Spain on the 14<sup>th</sup> of March, 2020, in the Netherlands people went out to the parks to enjoy a few days of sun, and even in the case of the “exemplary” Scandinavian countries, [Sweden continues with open schools and “normal life”](#). Therefore, it seems that the “Latin cultural singularity” would not be the cause.

If the aim is to understand this crisis’s depth, other questions will have to be asked. These are questions that invoke politics, and which must necessarily entail a much broader temporal and spatial framework. Explaining the COVID-19 crisis in Spain without referring to the EU and capitalist globalisation is an absurd and useless exercise. And, trying to find keys to understand this crisis with a time frame of up to one month can only respond to spurious interests.

## Financial strangulation

Firstly, **financial strangulation has prevented meeting the needs evidenced by the health emergency**. This situation has its origin in the fact that the 2008 crisis in Spain changed from a real estate crisis to a public debt crisis, due to the bank bailout, among other factors. These characteristics led to austerity policies – budget cuts in public spending in the essential services, including healthcare – and [large privatisation operations that have been particularly intense in healthcare](#). Besides, the priority of paying creditors – [financial capital that speculated with public debt](#) –, imposed even with an express change to the [Spanish Constitution](#), meant that public financial resources were not used to cover the public services’ basic expenses. Thus, in such scenario, financial giants, BlackRock amongst them, are becoming the main agents that condition the social and economic life of Spain. Whereas [social spending, for instance, in personnel and healthcare supplies, has been seriously reduced](#).

In addition to these cuts in public spending mentioned above, four other facts must be considered. Firstly, [large Spanish multinationals only tax 2,6% of their profits](#), while the general rate is 25%. Secondly, [tax evasion](#) represents an amount of about 60 billion euros (4,8% of GDP). Thirdly, the [shadow economy](#) represents 22% of the GDP, almost three times higher than Germany or France. Fourthly, with a [lower tax rate regarding the European average](#), Spain loses between 4% and 5% of GDP annually. Thus, Spain is at the bottom in healthcare spending within the EU context, with an allocation of [6.4% of the GDP \(1,594€/capita\) compared to Germany's 9.5% GDP \(3,762€/capita\)](#). However, there is a significant divergence in health spending by autonomous communities, which have competences in healthcare matters. Thus, in those communities where the discipline of austerity and privatisation has been more intense, spending is much lower, as are the cases of the [Community of Madrid with an spending of 3.7% of GDP, or Catalonia with a 4.6 % of GDP](#).

Thus, the shortage of medical supplies at the time of the COVID-19 crisis, in the same way as under-endowments and under-financing of public services, such as education, can be explained by the financial asphyxiation of public administrations. In turn, this answers the guiding principles of the EU aimed at satisfying the interests of capital, fundamentally the financial. Member States must strictly comply with the Stability and Growth Pact ([SGP](#)) to maintain financial stability. SGP is the framework policy on which the rest of the EU policies are subordinated. The SGP is articulated upon the iron-fisted control of the fiscal deficit and public debt. This is also linked to fiscal relaxation, especially for the rich and big companies, which has become one of the tax evasion mechanisms used by large capital, leading to Member States' increasingly limited financial capacity.

## Global capitalist reorganisation

Secondly, **the lack of medical supplies to deal with the crisis is not only due to financial strangulation, but rather it must be understood in the context of the capitalist globalisation process conducted since the early 1990s.** Thus, within such a framework, there has been a progressive relocation of the manufacturing segments to the planetary peripheries through which capital has extracted enormous gains. Those have been possible through an abundant and poorly paid labour force, favourable fiscal regimes, and null or deplorable environmental policies. It is under

these conditions that China has become the world's factory. [Chinese state capitalism](#) is articulated on a unique formula that combines firm social control, intense economic public intervention, and the adoption of the game rules of global capitalism. When the COVID-19 crisis erupted in Wuhan (China) towards the end of 2019, the Chinese government responded by activating every tool at its disposal. Thus, after a few weeks silencing the epidemic, China activated protocols to deal with the virus that put the Chinese factory's remarkable capacities to work with enormous resources. One of the most real examples is [the construction of a hospital in just ten days](#). The Chinese government also [destined its production of medical supplies to combat the epidemic](#), while its [exports plunged](#) due to the closure of trade relations with the Asian giant under quarantine.

Accordingly, the shortage of medical supplies from China in the UE can be explained because it prioritised its production to fight internally against the epidemic and the almost interruption of its international trade. Besides, the last decades' commercial and logistic dynamics are articulated around the principle of [just in time](#). That is, buy only what is needed at the time it is needed, since global logistics chains will provide at the desired time. Thus, the available stocks were much lower than those that could be needed at times like the current. However, it was not solely the consignments of Chinese medical supplies –particularly kits to conduct tests for the disease, respirators, masks, or special protective clothing– that were interrupted with the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis in China. The exports of these materials from the two EU countries that manufactured them, France and Germany, were blocked. [France and Germany requisitioned the medical supply in stock](#) and the pending production while prohibiting its export. Such a situation is a clear example of the absence of the so-called European project. At a time of vigorous intensity of the pandemic, Italy was only able to receive 30 tons of medical supplies from China. After the tensions that this produced within the EU, [the European Commission urged to end the blockage of medical supplies between member states](#). Once the circulation of the material recovered and given the high demand, [speculation has burst](#).

Beyond moral recriminations about speculation with medical supplies when lives are at stake, it ought to be considered that this material is subject to the rules of capital. This means value in circulation and the combination of the creation of scarcity –in this case through the retention of medical supplies– and the high demand for any goods, and medical supplies in a capitalist context are just another

commodity, translates into high profits for those who control its distribution. Thus, the phenomenon to face is the same behind [real estate speculation that treats housing as a commodity](#), or the food crises derived from the [commodification of food](#) that, in turn, bring enormous benefits to large companies. Furthermore, it is not that medical supplies and pharmaceutical products are subject to the logics of profit, but research that is fundamentally dictated by pharmaceutical capital interests. This is the reason why [large pharmaceutical companies have abandoned research on antibiotics and antivirals](#).

### Spain in the geography of global capital

Thirdly, the **role of Spain in the geography of capital** ought to be indicated. One of the main components of the spatial and economic arrangement of the Franco regime was the tourist specialisation of different parts of the coast as a way to attract foreign currency. As expressed by Manuel Fraga, Spanish Minister of Tourism and Information between 1962 to 1969: tourism was the Spanish Marshall Plan. Through tourism, it was possible to save the complicated situation that the regime was undergoing in the early 1950s. Moreover, Francoism was legitimised internationally through tourism within the context of the Cold War. Since then, [after each crisis, the tourism way of accumulation has deepened and intensified](#). Thus, after the 1970s crisis, with the breakdown of the Fordist accumulation regime, Spain prepared to enter the European Economic Community with the violent destruction of jobs and deindustrialisation under the mantra of modernisation. Following [Ramón Fernández Durán](#), that was the beginning of the era of the “explosion of disorder”. It is in the time of the Spanish insertion in the European project when Spanish capitalism fundamentally articulated upon the real estate and tourism pillars.

Furthermore, the large Spanish companies, analysed in a [recent book](#) by Pedro Ramiro and Erika González, emerging from privatisation processes, penetrated powerfully in Latin American countries that were under structural adjustment programs. The increasingly weakened Spanish industrial apparatus was centred around those segments that accompany the construction and tourism sectors. The construction sector has become the primary Spanish industry, and an important part of public investments have been used to build [transport mega-infrastructures](#). The result has been the hyperconnectivity that has transformed Spain into Europe’s beach and



second residence, thus deepening its tourism specialisation. In short, too many airports, high-speed rails, and highways and very few schools and hospitals. In part, in Spain and Italy's tourism orientation, the origin of the spread of the virus is found. While European authorities focused on controlling Chinese tourism, [the primary sources of spread of the virus in Europe have been Germans and British](#) due to their status as command centres of European capital, plus Switzerland for its banking condition, and their dense relationships with China.

The outbreak of the 2008 financial crisis was resolved in various ways, among which the following are highlighted: [notable expansion of construction in China](#), a [boom in commodities and neo-extractivism with the rise of the BRICS](#), a [new round of financialisation](#), the aggressive irruption of [platform capitalism](#) and an exponential increase in [international tourism](#). The figures for international tourists' movement –hence, domestic tourists who travel within their own country are omitted– are overwhelming: [from 916 million in 2008 to 1,4 billion international tourists in 2018](#). Most of these flows occur in Europe (50%) and Asia (24,4%), precisely the areas at first most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. If all governments have shared something until the health emergency has hit them, it has been persistence in trying to maintain “normality” so as not to scare capital and so that flights would not be paralysed, nor airports closed. Finally, flights have been progressively cancelled, and many airports already appear to be empty. The aeronautical lobby [IATA](#) (International Air Transport Association) announced million-dollar losses and demanded high interventions and public aid to rescue the companies, in addition to easing the rules to regain “normality”.

In the Spanish case, after the bursting of the real estate-financial bubble that still drags its effects on the real economy, triggering the unemployment rate over 20%, a series of policies were articulated to create a favourable climate for capital on behalf of economic recovery and job creation. After the bank rescue, the goal was to avoid the devaluation of real estate assets, which is why mechanisms were established to articulate [a new round of accumulation focused on disposing housing to financial capital](#), among others through the creation of Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT). Another relevant fact was the profound change in the shareholding structures of large Spanish capital with the [entry of aggressive investment funds in most IBEX 35 companies](#), among which BlackRock, Vanguard and Norges Bank are highlighted. The other piece of the relaunching of the accumulation cycle post-crisis 2008

was articulated around the frenzied growth of tourism. Thus, the evolution from the historical record of 58,66 million international tourists in 2007 to 83,7 million in 2019, which broke records year after year since 2013, is prominent. Furthermore, this spectacular increase has not only occurred in classic tourist destinations but rather, global touristification has spread spatially, with [a substantial impact on urban spaces](#) hand in hand with platform capitalism with the tourism commodification of housing, a process known as airbnbification.

Besides, large hotel chains and Sun and beach tourism areas benefited from aid packages such as soft loans from the Official Credit Institute (ICO by its Spanish acronym), tourist reconversion plans or regulatory reductions in urban and environmental matters to favour tourism investments. Even so, many tourism companies, which had expanded based on credit during the economically euphoric years before the 2008 crisis granted in most cases by savings banks— had to redefine their policy and prioritise the payment of the debt. This translated into a sudden stop in its international projection and the sale of assets, mainly hotels. At this time, the large financial capital entered the scene, which would later be part of the companies' shareholding (for instance, [Norges Bank with 3,5% of Melià International Hotels](#)) and it was also when hotel REITs such as [Hispania](#), created between the Barceló group and Azora, owned by George Soros, were established. Hispania was [subsequently acquired by Blackstone](#), which shortly afterwards also [acquired the company Hotel Investment Partners](#) (HIP), created by Sabadell Bank to manage its hotel assets, becoming the leading hotel owner in Spain. This process has led to the discussion of [hotel financialisation](#). However, it could be extended to the rest of the tourism corporations, as reflected in [Thomas Cook's bankruptcy](#).

Naturally, this alleged “tourism success”, conceived in terms of tourist arrival records and business profits, has hinged on reducing labour costs and the workforce's flexibilisation, which has resulted in growing job precariousness. The bulk of tourism work that has grown in recent years has done so on increasingly devalued work. This has been exacerbated by the growing financialisation of the sector, which has imposed much stricter labour relations. Technological changes and capital concentration have allowed the penetration of platform economies in tourism, which have further made tourism working conditions more precarious. Furthermore, the same availability of labour is seldom inserted into other activities.

In short, the increasing specialisation in the tourism-real estate binomial has led to a good part of Spain's productive fabric to concentrate on everything related to these activities. Consequently, the weight of other activities has reduced, trusting that the international market will provide the necessary resources so that the [Spanish economic metabolism can function](#). Thus, it is not surprising, when the flows of materials consumed by the Spanish economy are analysed that a good part of these come from third countries. Simultaneously, there are enormous regional differences within Spain with autonomous communities that are fundamentally net consumers of resources that are provided from other Spanish regions and third countries. The Madrid metropolis and the hypertouristified communities - the Balearic and Canary archipelagos – are highlighted among these communities.

### **Crisis of legitimacies**

It is under these structural conditions that the COVID-19 crisis bursts and shakes the Spanish society. With the passing of days, between 19 March, when the European Central Bank launched the emergency program, and 26 March, when the Eurogroup met, the health catastrophe worsened, and the global economy sunk. The issue on the table is the strategy to follow in order to face the COVID-19 crisis and its subsequent repercussions. At the [Eurogroup meeting](#), two antagonistic positions were starkly displayed. On the one hand, the axis formed by Austria, the Netherlands and Germany argues that each country faces the crisis with its own resources. On the other hand, the axis formed by a group of nine countries led by France, Spain and Italy demands a more ambitious program to cope in a coordinated and collective way with the coronavirus catastrophe at the EU. A kind of Marshall Plan supported through the emission of coronabonds. The Nordic axis is directly opposed to this proposal and, on the contrary, defends the austerity treatment for the countries of the South. An approach that, as stated, takes lives. Behind this closed position of Dutch and German authorities, there are colonial and racist positions, such as those expressed in The Guardian article mentioned at the beginning of this text. In this sense, the Dutch finance minister, Wopke Hoekstra –as well as the former Dutch finance minister, [Jeroen Dijsselbloem](#), who claimed that the South squanders money on women and alcohol– was uncovered when, during the meeting, he suggested investigating why some countries do not have a budget margin to face the coronavirus

crisis, implying that Spain and Italy would have misspent their resources. The Portuguese Prime Minister, [Antonio Costa](#), referred to this position as sickening.

In the face of profoundly racist and colonial discourses, which are translated into political action, that once again refer to the Spanish or Italian cultural singularity to blame the greater incidence of the pandemic in these countries, it is necessary to return, once again, to political economy to clarify what is happening. Correctly diagnosing the causes of such vulnerability is central to requesting and demanding public policies that break with the neoliberal dogmas of austerity and that put the needs of most of the population first. At the moment, it is not only the tourism model that is being questioned but rather the European project itself, increasingly estranged from everyday needs, which is facing a profound crisis of legitimacy. It is not fortuitous that in the post-crisis Europe, the [far-right](#) has furiously deployed, collecting the growing social discontent. The dispute over this pandemic's management will mark the immediate future and probably that of the change of era. Unfortunately, the new times will be characterised by the accentuation of disturbances, of which the current crisis is the prelude. At this time, it is no longer just a matter of demanding protection mechanisms that prevent the consequences of the crisis from being paid once more by the working and middle classes, but rather of questioning everything that has led to this enormous fragility. The lives of the majority are at stake.

## **SOCIAL VULNERABILITY AND THE SPANISH RESIDENTIAL TOURISM MODEL: SCENARIOS IN THE FACE OF THE COVID-19 CRISIS**

Antonio Aledo, Guadalupe Ortiz, Pablo Aznar-Crespo, José Javier Mañas, Iker Jimeno, Emilio Climent-Gil<sup>6</sup>

Following the socio-economic crisis that began in 2007, there was a certain boom in studies and research on social vulnerability. However, a review of the literature published in Spain shows that research on the social consequences of the crisis in tourist destinations has been quite scarce. However, the data provided by the National Institute of Statistics (2013) shows that Torrevieja, the paradigm of Spanish residential tourism, was at the bottom of the [List of cities according to average net household income](#). Based on this devastating data, which radically questions the characteristics of the Spanish residential tourism model, and in the midst of the exceptional moment generated by the COVID-19 crisis in 2020, three questions arise that we believe are relevant for applied research in the area of residential tourism: firstly, what are the consequences of the scarce presence of the critical approach in tourism studies?; secondly, what new social vulnerabilities will be generated by the post-COVID-19 socio-economic crisis?; thirdly, what can we learn from the previous socio-economic crisis to improve/mitigate the effects of the one we are already beginning to suffer from? Let us not forget another important fact: residential tourism has been the hegemonic development option in a large number of coastal and second line municipalities in Spain.

Following the advice of the promoters of this publication to reflect on tourism in times of crisis, we have repressed the temptation to fall into the *dangerous* task of predicting dystopian futures and, instead, we have tried to respond with a certain rationality to their proposal.

If the future is always uncertain, the uncertainty has never been greater than at present. However, thinking about the future is not about trying to guess. On the contrary, building scenarios is about underpinning the decisions to be taken based on a reflection on the present and the past. To formulate scenarios means generating

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information to influence: 1) the direction of the social evolution which is built on the basis of the macro dynamics to which we are subject; and 2) the capacity for action at a micro level which allows us to influence our living spaces. The prospective exercise of imagining interrelations between macro and micro variables, the review of past crises and previous behaviour of the sector, as well as their effects on local populations and the response options that were chosen, also helps to inform the decisions that have to be taken from now on.

### **What is the role of tourism studies in the face of crises and disasters?**

Previous scientific studies and publications offer a good source of information that helps to draw scenarios for the future. Research on crises, disasters and tourism has covered a wide range of events, such as earthquakes, floods, economic crises or acts of terrorism. Therefore, it is to be expected that in the academic corpus produced by tourism studies on socio-environmental crises and disasters we can find knowledge that will help to make decisions for the future.

In this exercise of reviewing the academic production, we come across a central problem in tourism studies on crises and disasters - and one that is undoubtedly much more extensive as it affects multiple areas of tourism research. When reviewing the abundant literature on crisis-disasters in tourism destinations, the central theme of the analyses revolves around the economic effect of these stressful events on the tourism industry (Ritchie, 2008; Nguyen et al., 2016; Becken & Hughey, 2013). The impacts of crises and disasters on host populations are scarcely addressed in the literature (Aznar-Crespo & Aledo, 2018; Aznar-Crespo, Aledo & Melgarejo, 2020; De Freitas Silva, 2019). It is convenient to address this deficit in a little more detail, since its consequences are relevant and reflect the uncritical spirit of tourism production, as well as its submission to market interests.

It is highly significant that in the review of the literature on tourism, crises and disasters, *risk*, *fear* and *distrust* appear as the three main and most recurrent keywords. In the articles oriented to proposals and measures for the recovery of the sector in post-crisis periods, the concepts of production of *security* and *trust* dominate the scientific discourse (Ritchie, 2004; Calgaro et al., 2014; Mair et al., 2016). These keywords emerge from work investigating how disasters affect the tourist's decision-making process (*pull and push* factors) (Kozak et al., 2007; Park & Reisinger,



2010), the impact on tourism services (Wang, 2009; Tsai & Chen, 2011) and the most appropriate strategies for infrastructure and reputation recovery in the destination (Wang & Ritchie, 2012).

Foucault taught us that in the practice of discourse analysis what is said is as important as what is not said. In this sense, the scarcity of references to the effects that crises and disasters have on local people and on the production of different social vulnerabilities is extraordinarily revealing. We are afraid that this deficit in the scientific corpus on tourism and crisis will be reproduced with the same intensity in the analysis of the current health crisis and the subsequent socio-economic crisis to come. This should not come as a surprise. Raoul Bianchi (2009), among others, has warned about the existing division in tourism studies between the hegemonic group called *tourism for business* and those that identify with a *critical tourism studies* approach (Ateljevic, Morga & Pritchard, 2013) in which *Alba Sud* participates. In order not to dwell on this criticism, it only remains to conclude by pointing out that the primacy of pro-sector tourism studies also takes place in tourism higher education. The critical approach is in the minority in tourism schools and degrees, which translates into the uncritical spirit of both future research and professional practice in tourism (Fullagar & Wilson, 2012; Wilson, Small & Harris, 2012). This absence of studies that directly address the impacts of crises and disasters on local populations will have negative consequences on the orientation of measures that decision makers will take in the face of a short-term scenario of collapse of the international tourism sector.

### **Vulnerability, crisis and residential tourism destinations**

The concept of social vulnerability has been defined as the characteristics and circumstances of a population, system or asset that make it susceptible to the adverse effects of a potential threat (UNISDR, 2009). Tracing the origin and use of the concept, we find two main sources. First, disaster science has worked on the concept of the production of social vulnerability, fundamentally from the work *At Risk* by Blaikie et al. (1994). This approach distinguishes three components in the generative process of social vulnerability: *root causes*, *dynamic pressures* and *unsafe conditions*. This approach focuses on the macro-structural causes that condition the situation of individuals, moving to intermediate political and economic spheres in

order to reach the local expressions of vulnerability. Secondly, the concept of social vulnerability has been proposed from the development sciences as an advance to the concept of poverty due to the static and excessively quantitative nature of the latter. At first, the dominant approach prioritized agency over structure, blaming the poor for their own situation (Moser, 1998). Subsequently, the theoretical developments of **Amartya Sen** (2003, 2005) and CEPAL's AVEO (assets, vulnerability and structure of opportunities, in its English translation) approach (Kaztman, 1999) for the Latin American context have redressed this deficit (Climent-Gil, Aledo & Vallejos-Romero, 2018). The most current studies on vulnerability highlight the structural conditions that limit the capacity of individuals and families to face socio-economic crises linked to the model of global capitalism and the expansion of neoliberalism as an unquestionable political and economic doctrine.

Within this approach, it is important to distinguish between structural and acquired vulnerability. Structural vulnerability refers to the adaptive conditions prior to the threat that place the population in a weak position to cope with the event. Acquired vulnerability refers to the new situations of vulnerability caused by the impact of the threat on the population. When these acquired weaknesses are fixed in the territory and in the social fabric, they are transformed into new structural vulnerabilities in the face of new threats.

To better understand the concept of vulnerability, two interrelated ideas are necessary in order to avoid errors of analytical interpretation. First, there is no vulnerability or risk without a threat. Second, people are not vulnerable *per se*, but are vulnerable to a specific threat. The first step in analysing the relationship between residential tourism and vulnerability is to identify the threat to which local populations are subjected in tourism environments. This challenge is difficult to resolve due to the complexity of the tourism system and its relationship to wider processes of social change and development. Similarly, the threats are diffuse and their identification is an ideological rather than a methodological problem. In this sense, we can speak of exogenous threats to the tourism sector and endogenous threats to the tourism sector. At first, we could easily identify COVID-19 and the subsequent socio-economic crisis as an exogenous threat to residential tourism municipalities. [This crisis will cause](#) a radical decrease in tourism demand, the closure of air access to destinations, the closure of local companies and businesses and its derived socio-economic impacts, which, by affecting individuals and families, will become elements of acquired vulnerability in the medium term.

However, the municipalities that have opted for the hegemonic residential-tourism model are facing the COVID-19 crisis in situations of structural vulnerability. This vulnerability stems from the exogenous impacts related to the previous socio-economic crisis that began in 2007, but also has endogenous causes as they are produced by the model itself. In other works (Aledo, 2016), we have identified vulnerabilities of an environmental, economic, social and political nature generated by this typology of urban development. The degradation of the landscape or the consumption of land and natural resources become elements of structural vulnerability, as does the hyper-specialisation of local economies in real estate activity. The educational under-qualification of the population and the political corruption that has swept through local democracies add up to structural weaknesses that affect the local community's ability to cope with the post-COVID-19 socio-economic crisis. This situation of high structural vulnerability of endogenous and exogenous origin places the Spanish residential tourism municipalities in a high-risk position.

### **Vulnerability scenarios after COVID-19**

The most likely and immediate scenario after the COVID-19 crisis is [the loss of the international market](#) for the next peak season. The effects of the health crisis on [air transport](#), together with distrust among hosts and guests, will be central factors in the coming tourism recession. On the other hand, as it happened in the previous crisis, national tourism, with an important amount of owned houses and the *veraneo*, as a value strongly rooted in the Spanish society, can be key factors for the survival of these residential tourism municipalities. However, fear and mistrust of the [arrival of second-home owners](#), mainly from the centre of the country, have already appeared in the host communities, generating a social demand which calls for greater control of this type of tourism. The health solutions to this pandemic will determine the strength of this rejection, but it is foreseeable that tensions will increase this coming summer if part of the population chooses to act in an uncooperative manner.

As for the property market, a sharp drop in sales is predictable. In the context of health and economic uncertainty, family investment in a second home seems unlikely. Property speculation may occur in the higher sectors of supply if there is a significant drop in the price of the second home market. However, this segment is not the majority in the Spanish residential tourism model.

This quick sketch of the residential tourism scenario allows us, aware of the high degree of uncertainty, to glimpse some vulnerabilities according to socio-demographic groups in residential tourism environments.

International residents, mostly retired migrants, are a high-risk group. Their response will be fundamentally conditioned by the solutions offered by the social protection systems of their countries of origin. Especially those from the UK, where the processes of privatisation of health care have been intense, will be affected. This could be a factor in their return to their homes in Spain.

Labour migrants are in a highly vulnerable situation. On the one hand, the weakness of their structural position and that of their assets (social, political and educational capital) offers them few resources to face the post-COVID-19 crisis. And on the other hand, return to their countries of destination - which for some was an option in the previous socio-economic crisis - becomes almost impossible as this is a global pandemic and as inter and intra-continental migration flows close.

The local residents –in general, although considering the internal heterogeneity of this group– are also facing this new crisis from a situation of high structural vulnerability, as they had not recovered from the previous crisis. For example, in the aforementioned case of Torrevieja, unemployment in February 2020 was close to [22%](#), while the Spanish average was [13.6%](#). Despite the attempts of the municipality to modify the centrality of residential tourism, the structural weight of the sector and its structuring effects on the territory and local society make it very difficult to achieve the necessary socio-economic diversification. Its urban planning model and the inertia of a real estate culture that has permeated the entire social fabric are also elements of collective vulnerability to the crisis. In this sense, it should be noted that, except for a few large companies that have tried (with varying degrees of success) new distribution and marketing mechanisms, the construction sector is very uninnovative. Moreover, a large part of the labour force is poorly qualified and construction workers are poorly prepared for their retraining.

## Conclusion

Acquired vulnerabilities are the expressions of the impacts of the crises fixed in the territory and in the social fabric. In the case of residential tourism destinations, the structural vulnerabilities which are typical of the Spanish residential tourism model

are added. Therefore, it is unlikely that the residential tourism sector will be a vehicle for overcoming the crisis which will be caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The conversion of *real estate economies* to *residential economies* seems to be the only viable option for these destinations in the medium term. Fortunately, they have sufficient resources to initiate this transition. The paradigmatic case of Torrevieja demonstrates these [possibilities of reconversion](#). The *sun and beach* binomial, the lifestyle of a medium-sized city, its infrastructures and services and its enormous real estate stock are some of the resources on which to reorganise an innovative and diversified city model. But these resources cannot be put to good use if the effort is not shared in solidarity. If the decisions taken in the face of the crisis reinforce inequality and social vulnerabilities, the processes of socio-spatial segregation and the degradation of public spaces, the emigration of valuable social groups and the general loss of attractiveness of the destination will be strengthened.

This transformation from real estate economies to residential economies would imply cultural, economic, urbanistic and infrastructural changes. The first step requires a redefinition of the residential tourist, which includes and emphasises his or her status as a resident. Local policies should be aimed at benefiting the broad community of residents, as well as meeting their heterogeneous needs. Municipalities must be committed to innovation, economic diversification and the circular economy. A redefinition of the peri-urban and adjacent rural areas is necessary, so that they are considered living spaces and not empty and unproductive lands. The urban planning model must be adapted to the needs of residents rather than the property sector. The socio-demographic profile requires a liveable city for the elderly, which demands the promotion of an alternative public transport model and the recovery of public space. Likewise, the real estate product must try out new formulas adapted to the widening of the top of the demographic pyramid. Furthermore, the attraction of young people will be favoured by the development of infrastructures with high digital and terrestrial connectivity.

Finally, we must once again turn our attention to tourism studies and the responsibility of the Academy in tackling the root causes of the production of social vulnerability. It is worth asking whether the mainstream will continue to focus its research on the search for business as usual formulas to improve the sector's performance and ensure the protection of its accumulation processes or whether, on the contrary, it will be able to take up the enlightened principles of a science for the common good,

with special attention to the most vulnerable. And in the training of our students, will the business approach continue to predominate or will we extend the responsibility of teaching beyond the mercantilist paradigm and include the social costs of tourism development? Let us not forget that we train not only when we do it well, but also when we do it badly.

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## **TOURISM ON THE POST-DEVELOPMENT PATH. [CURRENTLY IN THE TRAP OF COVID-19]**

Alberto Acosta<sup>7</sup>

After noting growing and serious social problems –particularly economic, cultural and environmental– in some parts of the planet, the conventional ideas of progress and its main offspring, development, are being increasingly questioned. It has even been proved that several “great achievements” (e.g. technological) are insufficient –and some are even counterproductive– to solve the serious problems Humanity faces. And in this scenario dominated by globalizing trends, many of the great developments that are expanding throughout the world –such as mass tourism– are causing new and massive inequalities.

[Now, these imbalances, added to growing inequalities and inequities, appear much strongly in an unprecedented scenario: a pandemic that paralyzes the world, which is already affected by a severe economic recession that has been underway since before the pandemic, and the evidence that the only real certainty is uncertainty...]

### **The dangerous inertia of a failed crusade**

What is important now is to overcome the very concept of “development”, tied to a range of “surnames” that have covered it, trying to find answers to make its solidification possible. Let’s remember that along the tirelessly pursued path over the last seven decades, when problems began to undermine our faith in “development”, and when theories failed, we looked for “development” alternatives. Like a son without a father who recognizes him, we defined “development” to differentiate it from what

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made us uncomfortable. But still, we continue on the path of “development”: economic, social, local, global, rural, sustainable... “development” after all.

“Development” –based on a never-questioned belief– was simply redefined by highlighting certain characteristics. And the vast majority of critics were never against “development”, but rather against the ways to achieve it.

Many things have been lost in this reckless race for “development”, such as the communities’ cultures to become workforce to ensure capital accumulation while expanding the massive extraction of natural resources. Besides that, community life, rurality and the very joy of a relaxing life were seen –and are still seen– as pointless and the cause of poverty and “underdevelopment”. Or, in the best of cases, to always keep the wheel of capital accumulation rolling, communities, rurality, and the joy of life are assumed to be programmable activities. In summary, everything is commodified, including the well-being and organized happiness of people.

In the end, all this effort has been pointless. The persistent scourges of poverty, misery, and inequalities, so common in “underdevelopment”, are still present. But also –and simultaneously– those countries that are assumed to be “developed” are caught in the trap of “progress”; it is enough to see the serious contradictions, conflicts and difficulties they suffer, as it is, to mention just one of them, growing dissatisfaction even among the beneficiaries of a greater material accumulation. While in this accelerated race for development the ferocious destruction of Nature is also speeding up.

In the middle of this Modernity chaos, the phenomenon of “leisure” has been transformed. Instead of being an expression of freedom and autonomy, “leisure” has become a commercial space of life itself. Leisure, instead of being an integral dimension of life for many communities, a time for creativity and sacred celebration, became a simple space to rest and for restoring the workforce to continue producing. Moreover, it simply became a business opportunity. This is where mass tourism emerges as an option for promising opportunities to live in “paradise”.

This activity, considered “the industry without a chimney”, has rapidly expanded at the pace of globalization. It has shifted from elite tourism to mass tourism. Many countries have transformed tourism into a major economic activity, often exceeding 10% of GDP for a long time; The number of tourists –regardless of the transport means– is exponentially growing at the same rate as the consumption capacity of the new middle classes is increasing and new mechanisms are being implemented to

maximize income and reduce costs... all of this with increasingly social, economic and ecological harmful effects for large segments of the population who receive this mass tourism: to such an extent that in some places the slogan “tourist go home” is becoming increasingly popular.

At this moment, “leisure” –including growing mass tourism– is one of the biggest businesses in the world as it concentrates millions of people, mobilizing huge amounts of capital. On top of it, that “leisure” reflects its “purpose” with the “metric of pleasure”: “born from utilitarianism and even hedonism. This is why “leisure”, as a consumer product, is also the object of state policies where it is planned, organized and instrumented as a tool to control and discipline society: as the “bread and circus” of the Roman Empire is reproduced –on a larger scale– at the speed and intensity of technological “achievements” and capital accumulation. And in this effort, tourism, along with “development”, seeks to confront a range of “surnames” such as ecological, community, and solidarity tourism... without releasing it from its increasingly alienating consuming elements.

This way, “commercial leisure” –in which mass tourism is included– is another reflection of a “badly developed” world (Tortosa 2010). [And that “poor development” could be found in what would be the “bad tourism”: especially mass tourism, which has been severely disrupted by the massive quarantine resulting from the coronavirus pandemic; it is enough to imagine the impact on people’s memories of those large cruise ship fleets docked at the ports full of people, many of them infected with Covid-19, without being able to go ashore].

## **The complex charm of transitions**

Overcoming this complex reality demands a task that involves a long-term effort and profound transformations, within the framework of multiple transitions. They will acquire increasing urgency as existing national and international difficulties, socially, ecologically, and even economically, caused by globalizing capitalism, deepen. Tourism is one of the pending issues.

It is not just a matter of rethinking tourism and not even about banning all travel, which has great potential, as it “kills prejudice and ignorance” (Mark Twain). We need to review the lifestyle, especially the elites’, which serves as an –unattainable– guiding framework for the majority of the population. This review will have to process, based on real equity, the reduction of working time and its redistribution,

as well as the collective redefinition of needs according to satisfiers adjusted to the availabilities of the economy and Nature. Earlier than later, even in “developing” countries –not to mention the “ developed “ ones– sufficiency will have to be prioritized as long as we seek for what is needed, instead of always greater efficiency –from uncontrolled competitiveness and consumption– that will end up destroying Humanity.

Perhaps, it is time to turn the reflections of **Paul Lafargue** (1848), **John Maynard Keynes** (1930), **Bertrand Russell** (1932), **Karl Goerg Zinn** (1998), **Niko Paech** (2012), among others, into reality. They suggest reducing the working day (to 3 or 4 hours, for example)<sup>8</sup>. This is a complex challenge because in societies ruled by productivism this is considered sacrilege.

In summary, as the German economist **Niko Paech** argues, individuals and communities must “exercise their capacity to live differently” (all in dignity, in harmony with Nature, NdA). This requires convivial proposals (Illich 2015) created from the bottom up, by individuals and communities that push governors to include them as part of their programs. In this approach, the proposals of Pierre Rabhi (2013), a French from Algerian origin farmer, thinker, and writer, who encourages us to move towards a “happy sobriety” society, can be found.

Ultimately, the task is to rethink the world of labour by linking it with other worlds from which it should never have been isolated. [Flatly, leisure cannot be confused with unemployment or quarantine free time]<sup>9</sup>. And in this effort it is also necessary to rethink leisure, not to regulate it, but to liberate it; not to make a business out of it, but to de-commodify it by expanding its community, creative and recreational potential, to diversify it from the enormous cultural diversity of the world. What is the place of tourism in this other world? This is now one of the imperative questions.

It is time to think about a world where all worlds fit in: the pluriverse (Kothari, Salleh, Escobar, Demaria, Acosta 2019); A world where all human and non-human beings can live with dignity, where people can regain and take control of their own lives, organized work and leisure time. From this perspective, linked to Mother Earth, it could be the perfect space to promote good convivialities (Acosta 2013)

8 [We will have to build societies where "working time is no longer the measure of wealth, but free time" (Marx, 2009, p.232), because "a nation is truly rich when instead of 12 hours they work 6" (Marx, 2009, p. 229)].

9 [Recommended reading: Acosta, Alberto. [Por el derecho al ocio, no al trabajo - Un textito recuperado en medio de la pandemia del Covid-19](#), Ecuador Noticias, 03/05/2020].

Let's not forget that human beings, like Nature, are not isolated individuals, but rather, a social and natural community; a community that has to be reconsidered and increasingly locally built: Will we be able to build "paradise" in these areas and not to look for it desperately and uselessly in distant regions, even with commercialized activities that awkwardly prefigure happiness? This calls for a civilizing leap in which "mercantile leisure" and alienation are replaced by "emancipating leisure".

### **[We will learn from the pandemic's takeaways?**

The unexpected coronavirus pandemic reveals how fragile our societies are. From one day to the other, the world was paralyzed and dominated by fear. The economic activity abruptly fell. Many warnings issued over the years seem to become true. Unstoppable economic growth crashes with biophysical limits, without technological advances solving these complex challenges.

The response and resilience capacities of the same societies and Nature are increasingly limited as globalizing relationships move forward: the interconnection focused on unstoppable productivisms, consumerisms, and individualisms, overwhelmed human interdependencies for the benefit of capital accumulation ...

In this complex moment, when the old world is about to collapse, several voices ask for a radical change of direction. It is claimed to follow the pathways of post-development, post-extraction, degrowth, conviviality, good coexistence... It would seem that the time for a great transformation has come, in the terms proposed by **Karl Polanyi**.

### **And something seems to be changing...**

The social State emerges assuming issues that should not have been commodified, such as health. Some fiscal rigidities fade. Politicians begin to listen to scientists, sometimes in a very slow, erratic, and deadly way (as in the US or England). But at the same time changes are emerging so that nothing changes: the State deploys old practices to repair the system by caring about the large economic consortium while expanding its authoritarian practices to control these types of health pandemics... and thus sustaining and reinforcing the status quo.

There will be time to analyse what has happened and the responses adopted. What concerns now is knowing how much of this global impact will be internalized



by the various societies and their governments. It is very likely, as happened after the financial crisis of 2008-2009, that the powerful people, even in complicity with their victims, impatient to overcome their collective house arrest, will return to the old ways. Capital, with “delayed hunger”, will accelerate the pace. States, in collusion with the transnational economic powers, will seek to improve their control and social discipline with new technological-repressive schemes. And many people will try to adapt to perversely continue pursuing the promise of “progress” and “well-being”, sheltered by the global mandate of “development”, sacrificing millions of their fellows and Mother Earth.

The memory of these complex and tragic hours of forced quarantine and accumulated pain must fill us with the strength to continue changing the world and transforming us in all areas of life: health and food, countryside and city, production and consumption, equality and freedom, work and leisure... recovering tourism not as a simple business, but rather, as an option for social and cultural relations to enjoy a plenty life, that opposite to the voracious capital demands, pushing us to a creative community slowdown, full of genuine joys.]

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## COVID-19 AND CRUISE SHIPS: AN ANNOUNCED DRAMA

Angela Teberga<sup>10</sup>

*“The history repeats itself, the first time as a tragedy  
and the second as a farce”*

(Karl Marx in *The Eighteenth Brumaire* of Louis Napoleon)

The imminent spread of infectious and contagious diseases within a ship has always been a cause of tension among sailors, and a challenge that is difficult to resolve for professionals of health control. It is a reason for tension among the crew because, being away from their homes, they fear becoming ill and not receiving appropriate specialized medical treatment. And it is also a challenge in the order of health control because the confinement, together with the high concentration of people in a single space, enhances the transmission of diseases among those on board, requiring strict control protocols by the health authorities and prevention programs by the cruise industry.

Some people compare a ship with a “petri dish”, a cylindrical container used in the laboratory for the cultivation of microorganisms, since both would function as incubators for microbes and, therefore, ideal vehicles for the spread of diseases. It is not by chance that news of viral and bacterial diseases is frequently circulated in the mainstream media. Only among Brazilian crew members, we are aware of cases or outbreaks of [scabies](#) (2011), [gastroenteritis](#) (2011), [H1N1](#) (2012), [measles](#) (2019) and, more recently, COVID-19 - which we will talk about it in this article.

### What does the international literature say about it?

In international literature, we find specific articles in medical journals about the occurrence of communicable diseases, among passengers and crew, on cruise ships. Mouchtouri et al. (2010) cite the occurrence of outbreaks and/or infections in vessels

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by, especially, *legionella*, *salmonella*, *escherichia coli*, *vibrio* (bacteria) and *norovirus*, *influenza A and B* (virus). Pavli et al. (2016) state that the majority of infections registered on cruise ships are respiratory (29%) and gastrointestinal (10%).

Fujita et al. (2018) analysed the notifications, systematized by the National Health Surveillance Agency ([ANVISA](#)), of communicable diseases on board cruise ships on the Brazilian coast, in the period between 2009 and 2015. The analysis of the notifications indicate that *norovirus* was the main etiologic agent of the outbreaks of that period, although the rate of outbreaks has decreased over time. The authors conclude that the large number of passengers and crew confined to ships would be the main reason for the contamination. *“This represents a high potential risk for the transmission of infectious diseases due to the confinement of these travellers in common spaces, with a high probability of exposure to fomites by the oscillation of the vessel”* (Fujita et al., 2018, p. 11). They cite mini-cruises (that is, cruises with short routes of 3 to 4 days) as a problem for the control and supervision of epidemiological outbreaks, as it is common for communicable diseases to have an incubation time longer than the duration of the trip itself.

Fernandes et al. (2014), in a study on the outbreak of Influenza B on a cruise ship off the coast of the state of São Paulo, in February 2012, concluded that crew members housed on the two lower decks were more likely to develop symptoms of illness similar to *influenza* (fever, cough, sore throat and dyspnea). The conclusion is related to confinement and the absence of air circulation, according to the authors.

The lower-ranking crew members were on such decks, usually sharing cabins that fit two to four people. There were no windows and circulated air came from air conditioners. The influenza virus is spread through droplets and aerosol from infected people when coughing and sneezing. Closed and crowded places, such as the ship's lower decks, facilitate the spread of influenza virus.

(Fernandes et al., 2014, p. 301)

Mitruka et al. (2012) explains that outbreaks on cruise ships of vaccine-preventable diseases, such as rubella, chickenpox and measles, are associated with the introduction and spread among crew members from countries with endemic transmission of these diseases, in addition to low rates of vaccination or not introduced or recently introduced the vaccine. Again, the confined and densely populated environment

is cited as a facilitator of the transmission of contagious diseases, including vaccine-preventable diseases.

Kak (2015) remembers that “*an infectious agent introduced into the environment of a cruise ship has the potential to be distributed widely across the ship and to cause significant morbidity*”. The infectious pathogens of potential risk in cruise ships can be, according to the author, gastrointestinal, respiratory and skin. One of the reasons for the high morbidity (rate of carriers of a certain disease in relation to the total population studied, in a given location and at a given time) within ships would also be related to the average age of passengers on ships, over 45 years old, and usually with chronic medical problems.

Finally, we highlight the important research by Zheng et al. (2016) on the transmission of respiratory diseases on passenger ships. The authors begin the article by remembering that, although the voyage by ship supposes an outdoor experience, passengers and crew are mostly indoors, such as restaurants, theatres, dance halls and the cabins themselves. In addition, they share public bathrooms, the same food and drinks, as well as the same air conditioning system. Finally, they recall that approximately one third of passengers are elderly people, who are more susceptible to infectious diseases than the rest of the population.

The authors state that outbreaks of respiratory diseases in passenger ships are aggravated by specific vulnerabilities of the ships, namely: a) a large number of people in close contact; b) duration of travel long enough to cover the period of virus transmission and incubation; c) diversity of people in the southern and northern hemisphere, where influenza vaccination may not be available during the disease season; and d) crew members can be continuous vehicles for transmitting the virus, as infections can remain on board a cruise from one trip to the next (Zheng et al., 2016).

The results of the study by Zheng et al. (2016) point out that the risk of infection by a crew member is higher than the risk of a passenger, because the crew member has contact with all the groups of the ship. They also indicate that the use of face masks by crew members serving in restaurants, bars or lounges, as well as the increase in the rate of air exchange in some or all locations on the ship, resulted in a moderate reduction in the rate of respiratory disease transmission. The most effective measure for reducing the transmission rate was the installation of high

efficiency air filters and devices for germicidal ultraviolet irradiation in the ship's ventilation systems.

The articles cited in this introduction suggest that the prevention of communicable diseases on board ships necessarily involves:

- Strictness with sanitary conditions and sanitary control measures in ports and ships;
- Vaccination requirement for diseases preventable by vaccination between passengers and crew;
- Quarantine imperative for sick passengers and/or crew members, who must remain isolated in their cabins to avoid contagion among other passengers;
- Use of face masks and incentive to respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette;
- Installation of high efficiency air filters and germicidal ultraviolet irradiation devices in the ship's ventilation systems.

All the articles cited support the thesis that the **confinement** and **concentration of people** on cruise ships enhances the transmission of diseases. It cannot be said, therefore, that the ship-owners were unaware of the imminent problem of contamination of some infectious and contagious disease, of any severity, between their passengers and crew. Unfortunately, an even more serious disease, discovered at the end of 2019, was found on several cruise ships in mid-February 2020. COVID-19, which spread to 188 countries and regions, has been diagnosed in more than 9 million of people and killed almost half a million people worldwide, according to monitoring by [Johns Hopkins University](#), also reached the ships.

## Cruise Ships and the COVID-19

COVID-19, a disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, was discovered on December 31, 2019 after cases registered in Wuhan (China). On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) started to characterize it as a [pandemic](#), due to the alarming levels of spread and severity of the disease, having reached almost all countries in the world. The danger of the disease is related to its high contagion power, even among asymptomatic infected people. The high transmissibility of the disease is even greater in confined spaces, according to Mizumoto & Chowell (2020), including hospitals, prisons, churches and, of course, cruise ships.

Between March 9 and 26, all major cruise lines suspended operations, voluntarily and temporarily, across their entire fleet. The main reasons for the downtime would have been: to avoid contagion of the new coronavirus between crew and passengers, [in addition to the sudden drop in demand and operational instability](#).

However, most companies were slow to suspend operations in a few days, or even weeks, after the WHO statement that characterized the disease as a global pandemic. Diverse images circulated through social networks and international newspapers: crew members working in the second half of March, when the disease was already present in almost the entire globe - on March 11, the date of the WHO declaration, there were 125 thousand people infected; on March 26, the date on which the last ship-owner suspended its operations, the number more than quadrupled, from 529 thousand contaminated.

Table 1 shows the exact days when cruise ship operations are suspended. These are dates on which new passenger shipments were no longer carried out, and in several cases, the last passengers had to stay and carry out social isolation on board. That is because, in mid-March, countries like the United States of America, Canada, New Zealand and Australia banned passenger ships from docking at their ports, as required by local health control agencies.

The Zaandam ship, from [Holland America company](#), for example, faced an emergency situation on board, with just over 100 shipped people with symptoms similar to those of COVID-19. The ship was in the Pacific Ocean and intended to cross the Panama Canal to land passengers on the east coast of the United States of America. Panamanian health control bodies, however, did not allow the ship to transit through the canal, only allowing the transfer of healthy passengers from Zaandam to another ship of the same company.

Several ships, such as the *Costa Deliziosa*, the *MSC Magnifica* and the *Pacific Princess*, remained in operation for weeks and even months, awaiting authorization to dock. On June 8, the [Artania](#), the last cruise ship in operation, finally made its final stopover at the port of Bremerhaven (Germany), after six months of sailing.

Unfortunately, the new disease was seen on several cruise ships as early as mid-February 2020. It is reported that more [than 3,200 people](#) (including passengers and crew) were infected with COVID-19 inside the ships, of which more than 70 died. In image 2, it is possible to verify the mapping, carried out between January and March 2020, of cruise ships with cases of COVID-19.



Table 1

## Suspension of operations by ship-owners

Suspension of operations	Ship-owner
09/March	Costa Cruises
12/March	Princess Cruises Viking Cruises
13/March	Azamara Cruises Celebrity Cruises Cruise and Maritime Voyages Holland America Silversea Cruises
14/March	AIDA Cruises AmaWaterways American Cruise Lines American Queen Steamboat Company Arosa Cruises Avalon Waterways Carnival Cruise Line Celestyal Cruises Crystal Cruises Cunard Disney Cruise Line Emerald Waterways Marella Cruises MSC Cruises Norwegian Cruise Line P&O Cruises Seabourn Cruises Uniworld Windstar Cruises
15/March	Bahamas Paradise Cruise Line Oceania Cruises Ponant Cruises Pullmantur Royal Caribbean
16/March	Lindblad Expeditions
18/March	Hapag-Lloyd Cruises
23/March	TUI Cruises UnCruise Adventures
26/March	Virgin Voyages

Source: organized from data from [Cruise Maper](#).

How have we got here?

Image 2.

### Cruise ships with cases of COVID-19 (January to March 2020)



Source: [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/s110320-covid-19-cruise-ships.html).

An expressive number of cases/outbreaks by the disease have been recorded on several cruise ships around the world. Table 2 shows the number of positive tests for the new coronavirus among crew and passengers per ship, including the number of deaths.

As shown in the spreadsheet, the two largest coronavirus outbreaks occurred on the Ruby Princess ships (March | Australia) –852 infected, 22 deaths and Diamond Princess (February | Japan)– 712 infected, 14 deaths. Coincidentally (or not), these outbreaks occurred on ships owned by Princess Cruises. Since 2003, the Princess has been part of the Carnival Corporation group, headquartered in the United States of America. The owner has 18 ships, most of which are registered in the Bermuda Islands (North Atlantic). The return operation return of their ships is scheduled for September 27, one of the most delayed among the other ship-owners.

On May 15, the [Princess Cruises announced](https://www.princesscruises.com/newsroom/press-releases/2020/05/15/princess-cruises-announces-dismissals-licences-and-wage-and-salary-reductions-for-50-of-its-workers-in-the-cities-of-santa-clarita-california-and-seattle-washington) dismissals, licences and wage and salary reductions for 50% of its workers in the cities of Santa Clarita (California) and Seattle (Washington), located on the west coast of the United States of America, due to the economic impacts generated by the pandemic.

Table 2.

**Cases/outbreaks of contamination by the new coronavirus**

Shipowner	Ship	Location	Positive tested *	
			Crew	Passengers
Aurora Expeditions	Greg Mortimer	Argentina	37	128 (1)**
Celebrity Cruises	Celebrity Apex	France	224	0
	Celebrity Eclipse	USA	63	5 (3)
	Celebrity Galapagos	Ecuador	48	0
	Celebrity Infinity	USA	3 (1)	0
	Celebrity Solstice	Australia	0	20 (1)
Costa Cruises	Costa Atlantica	Japan	149	0
	Costa Fascinosa	Brazil	43 (3)	0
	Costa Favolosa	Dominican Republic	10 (1)	3
	Costa Luminosa	Atlantic Ocean	48 (1)	46 (2)
	Costa Magica	Guadeloupe	7	3
	Costa Victoria	Italy	0	1
Cunard	Queen Mary 2	South Africa	1	0
Disney Cruise Line	Disney Wonder	Panama	46	1
Fred Olsen	Black Watch	Scotland	10	0
	Braemar	Caribbean	4	1
GHK Dream Cruises	World Dream	South China Sea	0	12
Holland America	Zaandam	Pacific Ocean	1	13 (4)
Marella Cruises	Marella Explorer 2	Caribbean	4	19 (1)
MSC Cruises	MSC Bellissima	United Arab Emirates	2	3
	MSC Fantasia	Portugal	0	1
	MSC Opera	Italy	8	0
	MSC Preziosa	Bahamas	2	0
	MSC Splendida	France	1	0

How have we got here?

Shipowner	Ship	Location	Positive tested *	
			Crew	Passengers
NCL	Norwegian Bliss	USA	0	1
	Norwegian Breakaway	Caribbean	0	3
	Norwegian Gem	Bahamas	2 (2)	0
NCL America	Pride of America	Hawaii	7	0
Phoenix Reisen	Artania	Australia	89 (4)	
Princess Cruises	Coral Princess	Barbados	43	39
	Diamond Princess	Japan	712 (14)	
	Grand Princess	USA	132 (7)	
	Ruby Princess	Australia	852 (22)	
Pullmantur	Horizon	United Arab Emirates	125	0
Royal Caribbean	Adventure of the Seas	Jamaica	19	0
	Jewel of the Seas	United Arab Emirates	0	2
	Liberty of the Seas	USA	2	0
	Oasis of the Seas	Bahamas	17 (1)	0
	Ovation of the Seas	Australia	0	111
	Symphony of the Seas	Bahamas	32 (1)	0
	Voyager of the Seas	Australia	5	35 (1)
Silversea	Silver Explorer	Chile	0	1
	Silver Shadow	Brazil	0	2 (1)
TUI	Mein Schiff 3	Germany	9	0

Source: organized from data from [Cruise Mapper](#).

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Islands (North Atlantic). The return operation return of their ships is scheduled for September 27, one of the most delayed among the other ship-owners.

On May 15, the [Princess Cruises announced](#) dismissals, licences and wage and salary reductions for 50% of its workers in the cities of Santa Clarita (California) and Seattle (Washington), located on the west coast of the United States of America, due to the economic impacts generated by the pandemic.

Although the outbreak of COVID-19 contamination at *Ruby Princess* was the largest recorded in absolute numbers, the extensive literature of articles in international journals of infectology on COVID-19 outbreaks on ships gives greater prominence to the *Diamond Princess* –on which we will talk about in the next article– both because it was where the first outbreak happened, and also because it was the only one where it was possible to map the origin and evolution of the contamination, still inside the ship.

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## **TURISM ON THE LATIN AMERICAN PUBLIC AGENDA: HOW DID WE GET HERE?**

Érica Schenkel<sup>11</sup>

The expansion of the COVID-19 pandemic has made evident the high vulnerability of the tourism model to which the design of our sectoral policies has led for decades. International flows are falling at an unprecedented rate and it is not expected to recover in the medium term.

The sector is going through one of the biggest crises in its history. Every day we witness the temporary and permanent closure of tourist businesses; many SMEs and micro-SMEs that could not withstand the continuity of the pandemic and, even more, to be adapted to the new normality, with demanding health protocols and a market with fewer consumers. This implied the dismissal of personnel, which is once again the main variable of adjustment, and the defencelessness of many families and informal workers who depended on the activity and remain helpless. States are showing increasingly deteriorated fiscal and trade balances, without the contribution that inbound tourism used to make. And this has a special impact on countries such as those in Latin America, which are committed by their foreign debt's liability and have few alternatives for integration into international trade.

With this situation, it is essential to collectively build a critical analysis that attempts to explain: How did we get here? What kind of development model did our sectoral policies aim at? For what purposes? We are in a moment where there is a demand for tourism policies capable of curbing the crisis, or at least effective enough to counteract it. I believe that, in the first place, it is necessary to answer the questions that we propound here. If we are unable to identify the causes of the problem, it will be very difficult to build overcoming strategies and not to repeat the same mistakes done in the past. The article delves into the role of the State. An actor who, after decades, is revalued in public discussion and, particularly, in tourism, to achieve the desired economic reactivation. Now, which tourism to support? And which tourism actors?

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## Tourism on the government's agenda

The State's participation in the tourism sector, which was initially linked to the promotion of the working class, the enjoyment of free time, and paid holidays, has changed significantly over the last 30 years. These relatively recent transformations cannot be underestimated, let alone ignored. The passage from the welfare State to the neo-liberal one generated new public-private relations that substantially modified the conception and management of tourism (Hall, 2010; Scott, 2011). Tourism policies are starting to be centrally based as an alternative for economic growth and internationalization, within the framework of a strong supply relocation and the sector financialisation, which no longer has the spatial-temporal limitation. State interests in the activity were no longer linked to individual and collective well-being, sovereign equality, quality of life, health, education of travellers, protection of the environment (Haulot, 1981, 1991); but shift to prioritize issues such as quality, competitiveness, private participation, efficiency and sustainability of the activity (Monfort, 2000; Fayos-Solá, 2004). The “market-based” analysis reduced the valuable cultural, social, and environmental contributions of tourism to the economic and business domain (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006).

This variation that assumes tourism as a public affair was evident in the different objects of state participation that the UNWTO highlighted throughout its history. In the beginning, the organization positioned the State as a key player in tourism management, to guarantee the right to leisure and paid holidays, to prepare citizens for tourism, to ensure economic and socio-cultural development, and to protect and safeguard the environment (UNWTO, 1983); to subsequently point out that it should only intervene when there are marking flaws, imperfectly competitive structures, the existence of public goods or externalities (UNWTO, 1998, 2001). The organization argues that the great challenge of current tourism policy is “to make compatible the market and business principle of freedom with the preservation of the structural advantages which ensure the continuity of the activity in suitable conditions” (2001: 166). In other words, it establishes a new approach to tourism as a public policy, essentially an economic one, which limits state intervention only in those cases where the competitiveness of the sector requires it.

In this new liberalism, state centralization disappears for a greater participation of professional associations, networks, and collaborative relationships between

the involved actors. National and regional tourism organizations reduce their development and planning functions to marketing and promotion. The new State's role generates a political contradiction. In Hall's words (2010: 10): "On the one hand there is the demand for less government interference in the market and allowing industries to develop and trade without government subsidy or assistance while, on the other, industry interest groups still seek to have government policy developed in their favour, including the maintenance of government funding for promotion and development".

### **The prevalence of pre-pandemic international promotion**

The COVID-19 spread has shown the vulnerability of the tourism model that has been driving the development of sectoral policies for a long time. A model that emerged with the standardization of a range of axioms positioning tourism as an engine of development, mainly in peripheral countries (United Nations, 1963), to show, from that moment, a continuous expansion and diversification, becoming one of the largest socio-economic sectors. This global touristic growth has caused an evident interest of the governments, in their different administrative levels, that begin to invest by strengthening the arrivals as much as they had been doing in the physical dimensions of the destination.

In these countries, inbound tourism is presented as an opportunity to attract foreign currency, generate income and employment and hence, offset negative balance of payments, overcome situations of crisis and stagnation or boost regional and local development (Scott, 2011). Moreover, the so-called developing countries, such as the Latin American ones, have to get inserted, almost exclusively, in the global economy through their touristic supply, due to the limited possibilities offered by their economic structures (Echeverri, Estay-Niculcar and Rosker, 2012).

Within this framework, States are committed to policies of tourism promotion to capture tourists within a global and highly competitive market. These strategies assume a clear leading role in the sectoral agenda to invest the majority of the budget in tourism ([Mecon, 2020](#); [Camara, 2020](#)). Although mixed financing is usually regulated, which recognizes the importance of promotion for both the government and the sector itself, in practice, private contributions, such as self-generation of resources, end up being minimal or even non-existent (Capellà, 2010).

The implementation of these policies usually involves the creation of National Promotion Bodies (NPBs) as spaces for public-private agreements, which formalize the participation of investors, professionals, and chambers linked to the sector, in many cases including the main transnational actors in tourism marketing (Enríquez et al., 2012). This gives entrepreneurs an important role in the projected marketing strategy, which not only determines which places and attributes will be activated as tourist attractions but also conditions the modalities to be implemented and their forms of access.

These bodies, such as INPROTUR in Argentina, EMBRATUR in Brazil, CPTM in Mexico or Turespaña in Spain, although they emerge as simple “technical” entities, tend to become true “destination management bodies”, bringing together skills traditionally associated with the administration itself, such as the analysis and study of the sector, the planning, and creation of new products and the dynamization of supply (González and Izard, 2010). This centralization of powers added to the prevalence of resource allocation, and other particularities that arise from being outside the scope of public administration laws, in many cases creates competitive situations with the same political body to which they report, usually a Ministry or Secretary of State.

Starting from this organizational structure, States use extremely expensive promotional strategies to capture the attention of the tourism industry agents. They implement different actions, such as training sessions on tourism products, the dissemination of publications, the financing of international mega-events, press trips for specialized magazines, workshops and farm tours for large retailers, and attendance at the main international fairs. These last ones usually include a great display: they start with a promotional stand, including an audio-visual projection related to the themed offer to involve the presence of the different exhibitors, presentation of musical shows, tasting of local dishes, and even the assistance of a person of relevance in the fields of culture, science or sport. They usually involve a hundred participants, representatives of private entities, associations, and federations, tour operators, airlines, cruise lines, hotels; and provincial and municipal delegations, associations and representatives of the main destinations integrated into communication strategies.

## Obtained results: between expectations and reality

These local tourism policies appear as the “territories’ hope” (De Myttenaere and Rozo, 2010), capable of generating the development of communities, contributing to the growth and diversification of their economies, revaluing their identities, and local heritage. An optimistic perspective that characterizes the beginning of the activity in any destination, but approaches differently the merged difficulties from the execution of these benefits, or their possible negative impacts on social and environmental issues, such as overexploitation of resources, the transformation of ecosystems, and pollution (Blázquez and Cañada, 2011), and even economic, around issues of public expenditure, displacement effects on other sectors, foreign exchange leakages and the type of employment generated (Dwyer 1993; Hernández, 2004; Shi, 2012).

When progress is made in the analysis of these policies to identify their real impact on the territory, multiple questions arise. Beyond the distinctions that the travel industry use to reward them, for example, with the recognition of the best stand or the best performance displayed at tourist fairs, the first destination or promotional body, or a promotion in the prestigious Future Brand Country Brand Ranking<sup>12</sup>, the results obtained end up being quite questionable (Dwyer, 1993; Shi, 2012). Even those linked to its main objective, the one that had justified its incorporation into the public agenda: the desired reinforcement of inbound tourism.

In many cases, the evidence proves that despite the significant budget affected, the hundreds of actions carried out and the private benefits pointed out by NPB representatives, such as “contact generation”, “new business opportunities”, “greater knowledge”, “marketing links”, “transfer” and “market positioning”; the arrivals are practically permanent, given the prevalence of structural factors such as the multilateral exchange rate, international connectivity or the appearance of high-impact external events (Schenkel, 2020), as evidenced today by the COVID-19 pandemic.

But, beyond the efficiency analysis of these policies, it is necessary to progress in the study of each of the assumptions that support their argumentative mechanisms. Aligned with what [Daniel Hiernaux](#) proposes related to Mexico’s tourism promotion policy, it is necessary to contrast its multiple legitimizing principles, such as:

12 The Country Brand Report is a report on the representation that countries have among the main opinion generators of the international economy and leisure and business travellers (Future Brand, 2017).

To what extent does inbound tourism genuinely contribute to the socio-productive development of a country? How is the income it generates distributed? How much is reached by the territory? What is its environmental impact? What type of employment does it generate? Which social and economic groups does it benefit? Is it related to the public-private decision-making structure? Which products, components, and places are active? Which ones are excluded?

The pandemic has proved the fragility of the global tourism model. The sanitary crisis not only exposed the extremely high external dependence and vulnerability that it generates in our societies, but it also proved its impact on issues such as environmental degradation and pollution, dispossession and eviction of populations, exploitation and precarious labour; recently aggravated by an accelerated process of financialisation of the sector, which concentrates most of the profits in the central countries and exposes externalities in the periphery (Cañada & Murray, 2019).

### **A necessary positioning of tourism policies from the local**

Until a vaccine or an effective treatment is implemented and widely distributed, international tourism, which unifies the sectoral policies, will not be able to continue developing at the same pace as it was doing before. [UNTWO predicts to recover pre-pandemic flows by 2023.](#)

The tourism sector will have to adapt to this new scenario to survive. Even the State priorities will need to be readjusted. According to the first countries that began receiving tourists, the “new normality” in tourism seems to prioritize trips to nearby destinations, which guarantee similar health conditions, and low social gatherings, to keep the security distance.

This situation must become an opportunity to promote policies designed around the resident; who should be prioritized as a visitor, worker, or entrepreneur in the sector and, above all, an inhabitant of that portion of the space. To support the development of many entrepreneurial communities that, having high potential and interest in developing tourism activity, had been marginalized from development policies. To promote proximity tourism, within the territory itself, contributing through our practices to the local economy where we live. To raise awareness towards more environmentally responsible tourism consumption and commitment to local people, their customs and traditions. To strengthen popular leisure as a space for rest, fun,

personal and collective development. In short, to include and equate in defence and interest of the great majorities.

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# LOCKDOWN NOTES: WHAT'S GOING ON?

## POST COVID-19 TOURISM EMPLOYMENT CRISIS: RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Rafael Borràs<sup>13</sup>

2020 began with a splendid FITUR (International Tourism Fair in Madrid) for the tourism business's expectations, and only with some vague hopes of improvement for the workers of the sector. The Spanish Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism, Reyes Maroto, went so far as to affirm that at the Madrid tourist fair "[there appeared to be magic](#)", since in "this [FITUR] for the first time, the debate on talent and the professionalization with *Fitur Talent*, and the certificate of Fair Hotels Socially Responsible is addressed. For the first time, people are a topic of conversation, and it seems to us that the fair is being modernised with much-needed debates. Talking about the future of the sector means digitalisation and people, but also sustainability". Surely, for example, "the kellys" claims need more laws, and less magic and certificates of social responsibility.

Neither Brexit, nor the recession forecasts in central European countries, nor the Gloria storm (which greatly affected the infrastructures built on land gained to the sea in most Mediterranean tourist areas) darkened the tourist prospects for this 2020. In the aforementioned interview, Minister Maroto stated: "All the autonomous communities, and the entire sector, show optimism for 2020." It was an "optimism" based on the permanent growth of tourists' arrival, as demonstrated by the airport infrastructures expansions plans (especially those of Barcelona and Palma) of the state trading company that manages the airports, that is, AENA. It was all optimism. So much so that, to reinforce this "happy world", well into February, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), delivering a prodigious display of its ability to formulate forecasts, stated that "[UNWTO maintains its forecast of tourism growth despite the coronavirus](#)".

Like any other year, tourism capitalism was preparing for the business wheel to continue happily rolling, with no substantial changes in the globally standardised

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model. This model includes financialisation, extractivism, and what matters in these lines, in the workforce's control based on insecurity, precariousness, unbalanced labour regulations (pseudo-authoritarian), and public subsidies ([old](#) and [new](#)) to flexi-insecurity, social devaluation of tourism professions<sup>14</sup>. In the words of **Paul Edwards** (1983), "the ability of capitalists and/or managers to obtain the desired labour behaviour from the workers" is a characteristic of the hegemonic neoliberal tourism model.

From global tourism bodies, such as UNWTO, to local ones, nobody obeyed the international scientific community's warnings about the imminence of a global health emergency, warned in the report [A world in danger](#), published in September 2019. Apparently, not having realised either that six years ago [Professor Ian Gordin from the University of Oxford predicted that a pandemic would cause the next global crisis](#). Thus, we were facing another tourist year: a) without the fundamental demands of "the kellys" being met (workload regulation, retirement at age 60, recognition of all occupational diseases); b) without any commitment from public entities such as AENA for Spanish airports to be spaces free of precariousness and labour exploitation; c) with the pandemic of outsourcing and downward company agreements activated; d) with the Labour Reforms of 2010 and 2012 fully operational in their fundamental objective: to move from temporary precariousness, as a measure of overcoming the previous crisis, to labour precariousness as a horizon, by weakening the negotiating and intervention capacity in the social conflict of unions, and the decrease in the protection of the fixed contract with the lowest business cost and more significant facilities for both individual and collective dismissal, that is, through an Redundancy Dismissal Procedure (ERE for its acronym in Spanish), or without it.

In other words, before the declaration of a state of alarm to combat the covid-19 pandemic, the legal framework of "the doctrine of socio-labour shock", applied in the years of austericide, was still basically in place. Meanwhile, the principal and urgent concerns of institutional policies (state, regional, and municipal) were how tourism growth continued to be promoted. Seen in perspective, the reaction –between shock

<sup>14</sup> Until the emergence of the "kellys" movement, the invisibility of the hospitality industry's working conditions was almost complete for the general public. Such invisibility is not at all accidental, and it is accompanied by imposed business methods of "proletarian competitiveness", based on procedures for evaluating the service provided by workers, and public-private campaigns so perversely authoritarian with the intimacy of working people such as those of "A tourist, a smile", or "A tourist, a friend". To delve into this last aspect, you can read Richard Sennett (2006).

and forward escape— of some authorities and tourism actors to the suspension of the ITB fair (Internationale Tourismus-Börse Berlin) at the end of February due to the coronavirus pandemic, [is tragicomic](#).

In a sort of dark angle were the concerns about ensuring that the people who make the “tourism industry” work (this broad and challenging to narrow down “tourism employment”<sup>15</sup>) did not suffer from working poverty, nor did they get sick while working. Except for rhetorical statements, there has been little concern in guaranteeing a dignified life to “those who clean hotels”, “those who suffer all kinds of precariousness at airports”, and “those exploited in restaurant kitchens that occupy exceedingly common space with luxurious terraces in touristified cities”. In short, paraphrasing the great Eduardo Galeano, all the “nobody” of the tourism industry.

In summary, the economic, social, and labour crisis that will follow the health crisis caused by covid-19 will occur without a shadow of a doubt. This conception is extraordinarily relevant in a capital-labour dispute scenario in which the subaltern classes are particularly weakened. It will be, as explained in the article [Tourism, de-growth and the covid-19 crisis](#), a crisis that will intensely affect tourism employment.

## And then came the COVID-19

Since the official declaration of the pandemic situation in March 2020, little time has elapsed to assess the tragedy’s magnitude in terms of tourism occupation. Above all, it is still not possible to be sure if the disaster will have a high conjunctural component, or rather, it will be mostly structural. In any case, from the beginning of this situation the International Labour Organization ([Observatory of 07-04-2020](#)) predicted that most of the job losses and the decrease in working hours would occur in the most affected sectors due to the halt —or intense reduction— of activities as a result of the coronavirus. A set of economic sectors that employ 1,250 million working people, that is, 38% of the world’s active population, among which are accommodation and food services. Despite the easing of the closure of workplaces, ILO estimates a loss of working hours that globally “shows a deterioration of the labour market situation and offers little hope that there will be a clear recovery this year” ([Observatory of 23-09-2020](#)).

15 As an example of the complexity of defining “tourism employment”, see the introduction to the report by Moreno and Cañada (2018).

Considering that a large part of Spanish hotels remains closed and that tourist transport, travel agencies, and other business activities in the tourism value chain operate at a minimum, a good part of the lost occupancy is in the tourism sector. This is observed in the data from the Active Population Survey for the period of the year with the highest tourism labour activity, the third quarter, in terms of hospitality (accommodation services and food and beverage services)<sup>16</sup>:

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Employed population	1,749,300	1,848,100	1,841,100	1,486,000
Employees (Waged population)	1,175,000	1,517,900	1,502,200	1,430,300*

\*This figure includes those workers affected by Temporal Redundancy Dismissal Procedures (ERTE)

## In the tsunami of the crisis: risks and some opportunities

Despite Spanish data on formal tourism occupation is still not robust, it is not risky to inquire, even provisionally, half a dozen considerations on opportunities and risks on the near future, which now is uncertain:

1. Critical thinking about the current tourism model may increase, globally and locally. We are in the presence of the ample evidence that the touristification without limits of territories and cities has become a “failed experience” to guarantee the social majorities, a more desirable type of life as it was expressed by Aristotle. Therefore, new scenarios are opened in which a greater intervention and involvement of work will be possible in the demand for de-touristification, diversification, and tourism degrowth. In addition to being desirable, it may be more feasible than before the coronavirus pandemic to expand social alliances around an eco-social agenda. Forward escapes from the already familiar “proto-productivist-tourism” unionism will be suicidal, among others, for three reasons:

<sup>16</sup> In the exploitation of the Active Population Survey carried out by the General Secretariat of Tourism offering data on the total activities of the tourism industry (accommodation services + food and beverage services + passenger transport + other tourism industry actives), there is no data on 2020.



- A worsening of the living conditions of working people with more precarious employment may be activated. The “emptying of the toolbox of precariousness”, such as, for instance, the 2010 and 2012 Labour Reforms, is always a postponed matter, and it not being part of what the Spanish Government calls “Social Shield” is, at least, an alarming symptom. Who guarantees that, by way of example, a new wave of outsourcing is not being planned to be carried out immediately after the current pandemic situation is overcome?
- Putting into practice, with all the consequences, the commitment to technological illusions, whether by [business](#) or [public](#) initiative, which – as sensed in the [Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan](#)<sup>17</sup> – try to avoid the assumption of limits to growth (and the need for degrowth in some cases), would lead to substantial changes in the field of employment. From a considerable increase in telework with the isolation of the worker that it entails and, therefore, the practical unfeasibility of the labour organisation, to greater inequality of opportunities given the profound educational gaps among the working population, through an intensification of job insecurity due to a greater weight of platform work in tourism employment. It should be noted, to avoid misunderstandings, that I do not postulate a sort of “21<sup>st</sup> century Luddism”, but I do claim to include the debate and questioning of false technological solutions to civilisation problems, within the framework of the dispute that is proposed in section 6 of these considerations.
- In any case, returning to the prior situation is a dreaminess, as there will be no occupation on a dead planet. Furthermore, it spurs the risk of encouraging propitiating social unrest and breeding ground for neo-fascism.

## 2. The new “tourism employment situation” forces us to rethink tourism with a greater distribution of the wealth generated, with zero atypical jobs, that is,

<sup>17</sup> The document Recovery, transformation and resilience Plan” includes sentences such as the following: “... tourism is a sector that plays a crucial role in our economy. In addition to representing more than 10% of GDP, it generates important driving effects on other sectors, so its total effect on economic activity and employment is even greater. Sustainable tourism, moreover, must serve to promote the ecological transition and serve as a tractor to boost the local economy in a sustainable way” (pp. 42-43).

without job insecurity or instability without cause. Historically, job insecurity has been considered “normal” in the tourism services sector. The debated question between the political, academic, and even the social mainstream has only been the degree of that precariousness. Consequently, societies with a high degree of tourism are generally societies with significant inequalities. In this sense, the tourism model intrinsically associated with low-cost labour can be an intensifying factor in capitalism’s cyclical crises. Recent history has taught us that the periods in which the concentration of income has increased most rapidly are the years 1929 and 2007. Therefore, it is logical to think that there is a link between the increase in inequality and the systemic weaknesses that have led capitalism to the two most severe crises in the last two centuries. In the 2020 one –although the trigger was a health crisis–, as had been suspected, [the persistent and scandalous inequalities of recent years](#) are part of the causes (which are always multiple) of this new crisis.

3. Linked to the previous consideration, it will highly likely be necessary to resist the discourse claiming to “first let’s get employment back, and then let’s talk about its quality.” The recovery of tourism employment must go hand in hand with the decrease in the high index of the vulnerability of wage earners in the sectors of this economic activity. The urgencies derived from the current crisis should not make us forget the important thing: repeal labour legislation passed by during the so-called period of austericide.
4. The tourism employment crisis may be an excellent occasion to propose the revision of tourism management regulations, with the introduction of de-growth criteria and the incorporation of working people’s rights. For example: reducing the number of rooms, expanding the existing ones, and fixing minimum personnel.
5. In this immediate post-covid-19 future, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) is required to play a new role. UNWTO should cease to be a business-friendly organisation, and start playing a role in promoting the common good, practices to mitigate the effects of the climate crisis and the eradication of bad and atrocious tourism labour practices.

6. Certainly, it is time for social emergency policies. Some governments –Spain amongst them–, are responding to the crisis deriving from the declaration of the pandemic with measures ([a good summary can be found here](#)) that, although with evident insufficiencies, have little to do with the plans for cuts to the non-rich population imposed at the beginning of the previous crisis. However, in a post-covid-19 scenario, the strategic dispute in the field of tourism occupation will be that of a new “flexi-security” in which the reduction of working hours, and, above all, an unconditional and universal [Basic Income](#) will play a crucial role. In a new context, in which the only provider of income to live all lives so they are worth living cannot be solely paid work, the dilemma is: distribution of employment and wealth, or barbarism.

Will this be possible? It will depend on social mobilisation, and on who wins a renewed class conflict. At this point in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is absurd to continue thinking of the working class as the only subject for social change. Bertolt Brecht’s “Questions from a Worker Who Reads” remains highly relevant in this disputed future. We shall remember them:

*“Who built Thebes of the seven gates? / In the books you will find the names of kings. / Did the kings haul up the lumps of rock? / And Babylon, many times demolished, / Who raised it up so many times? / In what houses of gold glittering Lima did the builders live? / Where, the evening that the Great Wall of China was finished, did the masons go? / Great Rome is full of triumphal arches. / Who erected them? / Over whom did the Caesars triumph? / Had Byzantium, much praised in song, only palaces for its inhabitants? / Even in fabled Atlantis, the night that the ocean engulfed it, / The drowning still bawled for their slaves. / The young Alexander conquered India. / Was he alone? / Caesar beat the Gauls. / Did he not have even a cook with him? / Philip of Spain wept when his armada went down. / Was he the only one to weep? / Frederick the 2nd won the Seven Years War. / Who else won it? / Every page a victory. / Who cooked the feast for the victors? / Every ten years a great man. / Who paid the bill? / So many reports. / So many questions.”*

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## A CREW TRAPPED ON CRUISE SHIPS

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After cruise operations were suspended and most of the passengers disembarked, the crew members had to face a different problem: the challenge of getting back home. The crew members were trapped on the ships, for different reasons stated below, with no repatriation expectation. In the article released on the 17th of May, *Miami Herald* estimated that [100,000 crew members were still waiting to be repatriated](#); out of that number, half of them were in US waters, [according to the BBC](#). In another article released one month later by the Miami Herald, on the 15th of June, [it was estimated that around 40,000 crew members had not yet been repatriated](#). Recently, on the 8th of August, USA Today newspaper estimated that [at the beginning of August, 12,000 remained in U.S. waters](#).

There were several complaints about forced lockdown. In an article in the German newspaper Zeit on the 28th of May, journalists [told the stories of three female workers still waiting to be repatriated](#). One woman said to feel “like in prison”, especially when the ship was at the port without being able to disembark. Another one complained about the lack of information, the high charges for the Internet service she needed to communicate with her relatives, and also about the small cabins without ventilation.

In addition to being trapped on the ships (as if that was not enough), they also had to live with the spread of the new coronavirus. Many crew members got infected during the quarantine period because, in the first days of the mandatory quarantine, the isolation and sanitation measures on the ship were insufficient. The Celebrity Infinity ship (Celebrity Cruises) became internationally known for [throwing a party for the crew during the quarantine, even knowing all the risks](#). This was not the only case. There is also similar news about the **Celebrity Apex** chef (*Celebrity Cruises*). One of the crew members said, “[When everyone was talking about social distancing, they organized a team party](#),” in statements collected by Click Orlando.

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The situation became so tense among the workers that suicides were reported. **Jim Walker**, [in his blog Cruise Law News](#), states that between 6 and 10 crew suicides could have occurred on the ships Jewel of the Seas, Mariner of the Seas, Harmony of the Seas (Royal Caribbean), Carnival Breeze, Regal Princess (Princess Cruises), AIDAblu (AIDA), Vasco da Gama (Cruise and Maritime Voyages) and Scarlet Lady (Virgin Voyages). All of them died from unknown causes<sup>19</sup>.

After these deaths, several protests took place on different ships. The image of the crew members protesting on the *Majesty of the Seas* (Royal Caribbean), with a banner with the message “How many more suicides do we need”, was released by many international media.

The complaints were about the delay of the crew repatriation plan. Repatriation agreements were postponed or modified several times, causing confusion and dissatisfaction. A couple of Brazilian crew members, Caio Saldanha and Jessica Furlan [were detailed reporting on social media during the on-board quarantine period](#) DJ Caio Saldanha stated to the *Hoje em Dia* newspaper, published on the 4th of May, that he [did not trust the repatriation schedule](#) and the lack of perspectives generated a tense atmosphere among the entire crew. “[We are being treated as liabilities](#),” he reported to the newspaper *Metrópoles*. The couple’s repatriation took place at the beginning of June. (In the next article in this sequence, we will publish our interview with Caio Saldanha, exclusively for Alba Sud)

**But what happened so that the crew could not be repatriated, as happened with the passengers?** At first, companies did not believe that the suspension would last that long, because they believed that the crisis would pass as fast as the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) pandemic in 2002. According to the [Cruise Mapper](#) portal, some companies predicted they would be back in business in 30 or 60 days, such as *Carnival Cruise*, which returned on the 9th of April, and *Celebrity Cruises*, on the 11th of May. It would be very expensive for ship-owners to repatriate crew members from different parts of the world and bring them back to the same ships; for that reason, the companies decided to wait for the return of operations with crew members on-board.

The spread of the virus and, consequently, the pandemic crisis was much greater than what the ship-owners expected. While ship-owners were waiting to normally

19 For more details see [Angela Teberga's interview with Jim Walker published in Alba Sud](#) on September 9, 2020.



operate, health control agencies of several countries stipulated a ban on cruises in their territorial waters. As a result, the crew had to carry out a forced quarantine until the ships were allowed to transit and dock at a port that would accept them. The most serious situation occurred with the crew of the ships located on the east and west coasts of the United States, where the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - CDC, established strict rules for the disembarkation of these crew members.

Even after the mandatory quarantine period, repatriation was once again delayed due to international travel restrictions. According to [UNWTO research](#), the COVID-19 pandemic led 100% of the world's tourist destinations (217 destinations) to impose these restrictions. Out of the total, 45% of the countries closed all or part of their borders to tourists; 30% suspended all or part of international flights; 18% banned the entry of foreigners from or transiting through certain countries, and 7% applied measures such as quarantine or self-isolation for 14 days.

With limited air traffic, some companies chose to take crew members home by sea (logistically permitting). This is the case of the [Ruby Princess](#) (*Princess Cruises*), which operated in Australia and arrived in Manila on the 7th of May to repatriate the 214 Filipino crew members that were still on-board. This was also the case with the [Island Princess](#) (*Princess Cruises*), whose South African crew was received in the port of Cape Town with the South African national anthem. However, even in these cases, a quarantine period at the port was required before the crew was allowed to go ashore.

In addition to all the problems mentioned, the ship-owners committed negligence by taking too long to organize the crew of nearby ships based on nationality and then to finance charter flights for their repatriation. If this was not enough, there are several crew complaints about the lack of information granted by the directors, the exchange of fake news about repatriation and even allegations of threats to crew members due to leaks of information to the media and the outside world, [as reported in the Business Insider report](#).

In the meantime, [the SSC announced that the ships were allowed to dock on US territory](#) if they met with the established criteria, including the fact that there were no confirmed cases of COVID-19 on-board in the last 28 days. Moreover, the SSC also required the submission of a comprehensive and accurate “**No Sail Order**” response plan, a measure restricting navigation on the seas of a given territory, which

would provide a safe environment for crew members to work and dock safely on non-commercial trips.

On the other hand, the ship-owners do not seem to be trying to regularize the crew members' situation and repatriation on US territory. The SSC weekly updates the authorization sheet for ship landings. On the 23rd of June, out of the 50 ships that applied for permission to dock in the USA, only 1 (2%) had the permission for commercial trips, the *Grand Celebration* (Bahamas Paradise Cruise Line), 44 ships (88%) had their plans being reviewed and 5 ships (10%) were waiting for signed confirmation

Some ships, to avoid CDC regulations, chose to sail to countries close to the US, which had softer standards than those of the US health agency. This was the case for the Royal Caribbean company, whose main ships in the Caribbean and Atlantic docked at the port of Bridgetown, Barbados, for crew repatriation by charter, as reported by *Loop News Barbados* el [25th of May](#) and the [20th of June](#) of 2020. For example, the *Harmony of the Seas* ship (Royal Caribbean) [arrived in Bridgetown, capital of the Central American island nation of Barbados, on the 27th of May](#).

The situation got worse because many of the crew members, who expected to be repatriated, did not receive the full payment to which they were entitled to. In a *USA Today* report, [a crew member stated that he was no longer getting paid because he was considered a “non-essential” worker when there were no longer passengers on-board](#) Although they had free accommodation, meals and medical care from the ship, there was a low payment agreement between the ship-owner and the crew for the time on-board. Thus, [Bahamas Paradise Cruise Line promised a one-time payment of US\\$1,000 to keep the crew working during the pandemic](#); [Royal Caribbean has paid a salary of US\\$13 per day](#), and [Norwegian Cruise Line reduced the wages of the entire crew by 20%](#).

*Folha Santista*, in a report on the 27th de March, [reported the offer of two indecent alternatives by the Costa Cruises ship-owner to the Brazilian crew](#): 1) to terminate the contract, upon request; or 2) to disembark without paying the fine for breaching the contract. The lawyer who heard the report, **Adriano Ialongo**, stated that, at that time, the crew members were forced to sign the request for “dismissal”, in exchange for “future compensation”, in other words, the return of the crew member to the ship to terminate the suspended contract when he would finally get paid.

CLIA, the **International Association of Cruise Lines**, a private law organization of the world's leading cruise ship-owners, [paid tribute to the crew members](#) on the 25th of June 2020 on International Maritime Day. In their official statement, they said that they were “[working 24/7 for the welfare of the crew members who remained on-board and to facilitate, in collaboration with local governments and the public, their safe return home](#)”. However, it is still unknown what kind of help was provided by the Association to the crew members that were waiting to be repatriated.

We all agree that in this particular case there is a dilemma. On the one hand, the right to repatriation is stipulated in many international treaties and, on the other hand, public health is also considered to be one of the fundamental human rights, therefore, the adoption of measures limiting the virus circulation, [including the closure of borders](#), should be necessary for situations like this one. Over the time, it has been confirmed that the delay of the crew members' repatriation was not only related to the ban on ships movements in foreign territories but rather it was due **to the slow, negligence and careless companies' behaviours towards their workers**.

It must be remembered that repatriation is one of the oldest and most fundamental rights of maritime workers. The first international convention about repatriation rights was in 1926, a few years after the foundation of the International Labour Organization in 1919.

[ILO Convention No. 166](#), whose specific objective is the repatriation of maritime workers, took international effect in 1991, updating the 1926 Convention on the same subject ([Convention No. 23](#)). Article 2 of the Convention states sailor's rights to be repatriated. Article 4 establishes the ship-owner's responsibility to arrange an appropriate and fast repatriation, usually by air, and to pay for the costs. Article 10 requires that members who ratify the Convention should facilitate the repatriation of seafarers who are docked in their ports or who cross their territorial waters or internal shipping lanes (ILO, 1987).

In addition, the **Maritime Labour Convention** ([MLC 2006](#)) contains Regulation 2.5 which aims to “ensure that seafarers have the opportunity to return home”. The crew member has the right to be repatriated if, among other situations included in point 1, it is not possible to ask him to comply with the obligations foreseen in the employment agreement. Moreover, paragraph 8 states that involved members are not allowed to deny any crew member “the right to be repatriated because of the

ship-owner financial situation or because the ship-owner states that he is incapable to do so” (ILO, 2006).

On the other side, the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) organized the “¡Basta!” campaign. The movement’s main appeal is: “You’ve done your job, fulfilled your obligations and accepted that at the beginning you couldn’t go home to contain the spread of Covid-19, but not anymore. That is enough.” The campaign aims to draw the attention of international authorities and ship-owners CEOs to the fact that keeping the crew on-board after the whole period of forced quarantine can no longer be acceptable.

There are cases of irregularities in the repatriation of crew members, as well as abuses by employers and human rights violations within the ships. Many became ill and even some of them lost their lives. Ship workers are always the first ones to go on-board and the last ones to disembark. However, this time, the disembark took much longer than expected. They were stuck in their working environment, anxiously waiting to go ashore.

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## SHORT-TERM RENTALS, COVID-19 AND PLATFORM CAPITALISM

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We know that the Covid-19 pandemic has stopped national and international mobility and consequently tourist activity as well. In this new context, it seems that short-term rentals have suddenly disappeared, that there has been a transfer of this type of apartments to the long-term rental market, and that tenants see this as an opportunity to increase the supply of rental housing and thus balance somehow a market that has seen how thousands of homes were lost to Airbnb. The opportunity exists, although I believe that in the current situation most tourist apartments will not return to the residential market. To think that due to a lack of tourist demand property owners and investors will start making long-term contracts is highly unlikely. In this text I try to explain the reasons for this situation, as well as to raise the need for a profound change in the current domination of neoliberal ideology in relation to the housing market. To understand how the short-term rental market is responding to the pandemic, it is necessary to first analyse the way in which this market has been reorganised in recent years, as well as the role that it plays in the current platform capitalism. I base my observations on the study that we have been doing of the short-term rental market in Portugal with colleagues Jaime Jover, Ana Gago, and Gloria Domínguez within the framework of the [SMARTOUR](#) project.

The first point is to see the benefits that this market offers to property owners and investors. The success of short-term rentals is explained not only because property owners can obtain more revenues by renting to visitors than to permanent residents, but also –and in some cases especially– due to a series of advantages that are inherent to the flexibility of this market. This flexibility means having control over the asset. The short-term rental market allows landlords to obtain profits from rental income and, at the same time, sell the property, use it, or directly abandon the market when they will. Another advantage of this control over the asset is that the maintenance of the property is constant since it is possible to check the condition of the apartments weekly; that tourists pay in advance; and that the high turnover of “tenants” allows

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landlords to constantly speculate with rental prices. In other words, landlords view the traditional rental market as “too rigid” for the simple fact of having long-term tenants. This is a vision shared by both local property owners and international investors. And in this sense, the flexibility of tourist apartments is a key point in the current context in which housing is seen as a financial asset. As in many other countries, one response to the 2008 crisis in Portugal was to approve several programs to attract international capital that provide tax benefits to real estate investments. In these cases, the main reason to invest in housing is to deposit capital and then decide on the use to be made of the home, or directly leave it empty. [In our work we found a consensus in which placing the house in the tourist market is always the best option for this type of investors](#) since they can use the house when they visit the destination or sell it without tenants when they find a good opportunity. Ultimately, the short-term rental market greatly increases the possibility of speculating on housing. This fact represents a neoliberal utopia that represents another twist on the vulnerability and insecurity of groups for who the rental market is the only option to access housing. While the flexibilisation and deregulation of the rental market have been key neoliberal policies to give more “security” to property owners and supposedly to improve market efficiency, the tourist rental market simply ignores any leasing law, however flexible it may be, reinforcing the neoliberal paradigm and strengthening the asymmetry of power between owner and occupier. Property owners no longer need tenants to obtain revenues from rental income, unless they accept short-term contracts. It is paradoxical to see –and this is the main problem– how in this neoliberal utopia the housing market does not function more efficiently, but housing directly loses its social function.

Going back to the context of the pandemic, for landlords a central benefit provided by the flexibility of this market is to adjust both prices and length of letting to existing demand. For example, a recurring strategy in Lisbon has been to rent to tourists during the summer season and move to the international student market during the academic period. Flexibility here means moving to other forms of rental during times when those forms are more profitable, and this transition to a different sector is not very difficult. The change from short- to mid-term rentals is what seems to be happening during the current pandemic. In the report [How Mid-Term Stays May Rescue Short-Term Rentals](#) the consultancy company AirDNA shows that more than 50% of nights booked worldwide on Airbnb in April 2020 were for



stays of more than 2 weeks. AirDNA also advises offering discounts for stays of more than a month, with the intention of renting properties for a few months and then eventually returning to the tourist rental market. However, AirDNA only has data on Airbnb activity, and this is far from the total reality of the market. The situation is more complex as I will explain below.

The second point to highlight is the appearance of short-term rental management companies and how they position themselves in the current platform capitalism. These are companies that manage properties for third parties. The activity has professionalised, and it is very difficult for an individual host to compete in the market, which means that they have many incentives to hand over the management of the apartments to these agencies. The growth of these companies has been exponential - there are 40 in Lisbon alone - and many of them have become transnationals due to the financial aid provided by investment funds. For example, companies like [Hostmaker](#), [Sweet Inn](#) and [Guest Ready](#) have a portfolio of thousands of apartments across Europe. The important point regarding the current situation is how the management structure of these agencies allows them to advertise the apartments on different digital platforms simultaneously. To do this, they use channel managers, which is a technology used for years by the hotel industry to sell the same product (apartments in this case) in different channels like Airbnb, Homeaway and Booking.com. Although these are the 3 best-known platforms in the tourist apartment market, there are companies such as Rentals United that offers channel managers that market each apartment on more than 60 platforms. When a reservation is made on one of them, the program locks the apartment on the other platforms. The truth is that these management programs already included before the pandemic the possibility of advertising the apartments on mid-term rental platforms such as [Soptahome](#) (minimum 30 day stays) or [Uniplaces](#) (focused on the international student market). The spread of this type of platforms comes to further reinforce the neoliberal utopia where rentals with stable contracts are no longer necessary and the consequent loss of the social function of housing. Inspired by Airbnb, all of them work for payment in advance; without the possibility of visiting the apartment; usually without a tenancy agreement; they are for short- or mid-term stays; and the prices are exorbitant. The current pandemic is accelerating the move of apartments between different platforms and the new thing is that short-term rental management companies are using their channel managers to advertise properties on platforms

that were in theory for long-term rental. For example, Hostmaker has included in its channel manager platforms such as Idealista in Spain and Portugal and Rightmove in the United Kingdom, but the listings indicate that the rent is for a short period of time. The consequence is that the intrinsic flexibility of tourist apartments, digital platforms and the use of technologies for real estate management allow owners to speculate on assets for a few months while waiting for the market to re-emerge, as this seems to be the case at least if domestic tourism is finally allowed.

Given the current crisis in the rental housing market, which will be reinforced by the economic consequences of the pandemic, we simply cannot wait for the market to adjust to existing demand and for short-term rentals supposedly to return to the residential market. Landlords want by all means to avoid stable leases, so an alleged transfer of homes to long-term rentals will not occur as a general trend. The neoliberal utopia of tourist apartments and digital platforms for transient consumers have increased the vulnerability of tenants as never before to such an extent that housing has lost its social role. The only way to achieve a balance between property owners and tenants is with the intervention of the state, and in view of the fact that the “efficiency” of this market is simply the opportunity it offers to speculate, this intervention must be immediate. In other words, while there is an opportunity opened by the pandemic, it is time to act. In Spain, for instance, short- and mid-term rentals are backed by the Urban Lease Law that allows rentals for “uses other than housing”, with housing defined as a permanent residence. In other words, this figure allows “seasonal leases”, and using this figure property owners avoid making long-term contracts. This law has to be redefined immediately. Admittedly, the initiative taken by platform capitalism skips and invalidates existing regulations, but in the face of this speculative offensive the state cannot simply observe how the market is reorganising. We are at the beginning of an unprecedented crisis and courageous measures are necessary to recover the social function of the thousands of tourist apartments that today await the return to a supposed normality.

## COVID-19 AND HOTEL FINANCIALISATION

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After the irruption of the 2008 crisis, the financialisation process of hotel corporations and hotel assets intensified (Yrigoy, 2016, 2019). The financialisation of hotel corporations in Spain has taken place through three interrelated process. First, through hotel corporations' *indebtedness*. Such *indebtedness* process has taken place in order to increase the corporations' hotel portfolios (Murray, 2015, Yrigoy, 2019). Second, The IPO of a company such as NH Hoteles or Meliá implied that various investors –both Spanish and non-Spanish– broke into the ownership of these companies (Yrigoy, 2016). Finally, the hotel companies undertook an asset rotation strategy; which consisted of selling part of its hotel assets to investment funds (Yrigoy, 2019). With this process, hotel companies managed, on the one hand, to considerably reduce their debts, while investment funds –normally operating as Reits– managed to extract hotel rents (Yrigoy, 2019). The rents extracted from hotel assets have been especially relevant for investment funds since they are the most profitable type of real estate asset –in € / m<sup>2</sup>– (Yrigoy, 2016).

### The immediate impact of the pandemic crisis on the hotel Financialisation process

The hotel sector was one of the most affected by the almost total decrease in tourists –[98% in March 2020 in Spain](#)– as a result of the COVID19 crisis (Statista, 2020). This drop has caused a series of challenges (and opportunities) for financial actors operating in hotels.

The first challenge lies in the falling extraction of rents in all hotel assets as occupancy levels fall in all hotels, including those partially or totally owned by investment funds. In the case of Meliá, its profits fell 25% in the first quarter of 2020 (Meliá Hotels, 2020). The other large Spanish company on the stock market, NH Hoteles, decided in April 2020 [to stop paying dividends to investors](#), waiting

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to reverse the effects of the pandemic on tourism. Such a scenario has dragged the owners of hotel assets, [who have seen their profits reduce](#).

What is the positioning of the large investment funds in the face of such a fall in profits? Contrary to the post-2008 situation, when banks and hotel companies had to sell hotel assets pressed by post-crisis banking regulations on the one hand and huge debts on the other (Yrigoy, 2019), investment funds will bet not to divest and wait for the epidemiological situation to improve. From an investment fund point of view, divesting now would mean internalizing the devaluation that is taking place in the built environment: it would be selling at a lower price than the hotels have been bought, and therefore launching the unacceptable message –for investment funds' investors– that these funds are not the best vehicles to make investments profitable. The only strategy that can be assumed in the short term by investment funds is to wait and try to assume the least possible part of the devaluation that is taking place. The sale-and-leaseback agreements between investment funds and hotel companies have one fixed amount to be paid by the hotel manager (usually the hotel company), and another part of the rent that is variable according to the amount of hotel income.

The drop in the variable rent being paid by hotel companies is being taken over by financial investors. It is, however, in the part of the hotel rental corresponding to the fixed income where there are more tensions between the financial rentier and the hotel manager: negotiations between investment funds and hotel companies have taken place, [since the latter wish to lower the fixed amount of hotel rents](#). What is being negotiated is, therefore, who bears the cost of the devaluation caused by the COVID-19.

### **The future of hotel financialisation: scenarios**

The decrease in the rents extracted from hotels has not meant a slowdown in the financial dynamics in hotels, but rather a reconfiguration of these relationships. First of all, there is an acceleration of the banking business with hotel companies: although historically hotel expansion had been based on bank loans, this trend came to a halt in 2008, when the debts of the hotel companies and the needs of banks to comply with post-crisis banking regulations (Murray, 2015; Yrigoy, 2018). The current scenario is, however, different. [Hotel companies have alleviated their pre-2008 debt, with the continued rise in the number of tourists in hotels, and, above all, since](#)

[the revaluation of hotel assets](#). Banks have seen how the banking regulation regulations [have been officially relaxed in the current scenario](#). This has made it easier for Spanish banks to relax their criteria for granting loans to several productive sectors, including the hotel sector. In this sense, various hotel companies have signed syndicated loans with banking entities: this is the case of NH Hoteles, which [in May 2020 signed a syndicated loan worth 225 million euros and granted by BBVA, Santander, Bankinter and Bankia](#).

In addition to banks progressive interrelation with large hotel conglomerates, **it is expected that investment funds will take advantage of the devaluation suffered by hotel assets as they did in 2008-18 in order to accelerate their investments in hotels even more**. The roadmap for hotel investment funds therefore has two stages. The first one, where once the hotel managers with greater integration with tour operators and greater pressure on public powers manage to attract tourists, investment funds will be able to extract rents from these hotels and recover the investments made just prior to covid19. The second step will be to invest again in those small hotels where the damage from a blank season is irreparable: hotels drowned by the lack of tourists and by mortgage loans. However, **investment funds are going to have two new limits on their hotel investments**: first, the pandemic is a risk factor that can randomly interrupt tourist flows and, therefore, the rents that are extracted from hotels. Whether this factor is decisive or not to stop investments in hotels will depend on the evolution of the pandemic itself and on whether investment funds find some other asset to invest in that is both safer and more profitable than hotel tourism. Second, mutual funds may have a competitor they have not had in the last decade: traditional banking, eager to make profitable investments and unleashed by post-2008 regulations.

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## THE FUTURE OF TOURISTIC CITIES AFTER THE PANDEMIC

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If there is something we can be sure is that we face an uncertain future after the withdrawal of the most restrictive measures implemented by governments around the world to stop the spread of COVID-19, as well as the devastating results for public health. The only thing we can speculate is that those measures would have had an important impact on the social, economic, political, environmental and cultural fabric at a global scale. Suffice to note that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has estimated for 2020 a global GDP drop of 3%, whereas the GDP fall predicted for Spain is 8% and for the Eurozone 7.5%. Regarding unemployment, forecasts are not flattering, since [it is foreseen that the rate of unemployment in Spain will increase up to 20.8% and to 10.4% in the Eurozone](#). While it is true that IMF has failed more than once in its predictions (Bird, 2005), the magnitude of that data should lead us to think about some of the possible consequences derived from the pandemic. In this text I will focus on those questions that could affect the future of cities in a post-COVID-19 scenario.

### The role of cities

Many authors have highlighted the role played by cities in the cycles of capitalist accumulation since the 1970s (Harvey, 1989; Smith, 2012). Furthermore, this leading role has been accentuated due to a new phenomenon in humanity's history: urban world population exceeds rural population since 2007 –50.14% compared to 49.86%–. Since then, this trend has increased and in 2018, according the last available data (World Bank, 2020), urban population accounts for the 55.27% of world population. This is extraordinarily important with regard to cities from the advanced

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capitalist States of Western Europe and North America since they have come to be designed for and by consumption and production.

The cities of the advanced capitalist states of Occidental Europe and North America are designed for production and consumption. In our closest context, the European Commission (EC) already pointed out that, in the document [European Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth](#), the goals to reach, as well as the main threats with a 2020 horizon. In the case of the objectives, it was all about turning the cities in places of social progress, with a high rate of cohesion, a balanced access to housing and education, health and social services for everybody; moving forward to its consideration as platforms for democracy, diversity and cultural dialogue; providing them with green spaces, ecological and environmentally regenerated and, finally, positioning them as essential places for the attraction of capital and the generation of economic growth, among the activities considered leisure and tourism. Regarding the threats, they consisted of a low demographic growth, limited competitiveness and development; the possibility of a certain social polarisation; the depletion of natural resources and, finally, the existence of inefficient government systems. Despite this, the diverse [measures adopted by the States that constitute the European Union](#) (EU), in their fight against the propagation of COVID-19, have thrown all these forecasts down the drain.

Despite everything that has changed, it is quite likely that the role of cities as economic drivers, assigned to them during the capitalist transition from a *rigid-Fordism* model to a *flexible-neoliberal* one, will still be standing (Harvey 1989). Although during this short time of downfall and uncertainty we have been a witness of the emergence of [a great number of appeals to an alternative future](#), with a friendlier economy, more focused on the people and with closer and more human social relations, truth is this will not be determined by our deepest desires, but rather by the correlation of forces that we are able to put into practice once the hardest stage of confinement is over in a global scale.

It is necessary to remember that the way out of the previous crisis, the so-called *Great Recessions*, materialised, in the case of many cities, in a new spin in the tertiarization of their economies and the precarization of its employment (Marrero, 2003). In fact, Spain prevails, since then, highly indebted and with a low wage base due to the process of devaluation lived. The recuperation brought us cities with a strong touristic component which, in determined circumstances, ended up generat-

ing strong impacts in the housing market, mainly rents, an advanced privatisation of the public space and a certain homogenisation of the urban commercial landscape.

If we remain alert to the signs the economy is sending us during these days of the pandemic, maybe we will be able to predict our most immediate future and, in the case that it does not result attractive, starting to suggest and plan ideas and actions to change it. If the different analysis being published coincide in something is that, among the main beneficiaries of this brief but intense transformation, are those multinational companies linked to the *platform capitalism* (Srnicsek, 2016) and streaming entertainment, as the huge distribution companies. [Among the first, we find the examples of Deliveroo and Glovo, which have increased their staff – fake self-employed workers – in a moment in which online commerce is not sufficient.](#) Also, Netflix, HBO and others have seen the number of their subscribers rise exponentially. So much that the European Commission (EC) itself has been forced to asked them to lower the quality of their emissions in order not to collapse the net. Among the latter, we find Amazon, a [company that might find itself in a context of almost a private monopoly in the distribution of many countries](#), Spain among them.

The potentiality of these changes might locate the commercial network of our cities closer to homogenisation and production specialisation. If right now, as [the anthropologist Manuel Delgado](#) points out, *there is nothing that looks more similar to the centre of a big European city than another big European city*, the power those businesses may have could push our streets and squares even more in this direction. The small business of catering, bars and restaurants, cinemas, proximity trade and classical commerce where already at risk of extinction before; maintaining a minimum capacity of resisting the adversity in comparison to the great productive agents. In the reclusion, many are the voices that, optimistically forecast that, once the confinement is over, the people now in their homes will go running to the streets to make up for the lost time. However, it is also possible that the past enclosed leisure time stays there to keep pushing for employments that, replacing those lost, do not allow for another model than the modest consumption at home.

Regarding tourism, the situation is practically identic. With the huge tour operators completely paralysed, the hotels and touristic accommodation depend, as well, on multinational companies that operate virtually, such as Booking, TripAdvisor and others, to reach to future clients, in addition to the power of their booking mechanisms. This places, again, the small business in the hands of enormous inter-

national interests, meaning that the evolution and competitiveness of the market may force many of them to close. A concentration of the offer with clear survivors: the current hotel groups, which obviously have more capacity of resilience and which, probably, may have been able to receive government and European grants. [It is not the same being a business of the IBEX35, such as Melià, than a small provincial familiar hotel](#). Furthermore, as a measure already practised and well-known by these actors, it is the advances in outsourcing of services protected by the present law, but also future legislation.

In conclusion, more homogeneous cities in the hands of fewer enterprises however more powerful and with a strong technological component. This could be the dystopic future that awaits some consumers, workers –and producers of the city– that we may see manifesting the great asymmetries of power entailed. That is the reason why grants and regulations are needed to help the small business and self-employed workers that will have a hard time surviving, but also to rethink the role of the great shopping centres at the outskirts of big towns, with their effects upon employment and consumption of resources in the territory. And, regarding the tourist sector, we cannot forget it is one of the productive sectors that already suffered from less protection and lower salaries. This crisis cannot be an excuse to go further in the dynamics of externalisation and unprotecting, but rather the contrary. It is in our hands to change this destiny.

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## TOURISTOCRACY: ORGANIZED VULNERABILITY

Joaquín Valdivielso & Jaume Adrover<sup>23</sup>

The stand-by that the COVID-19 pandemic has meant in 2020 recalls the image of the state of nature. This hypothetical device allowed classical thinkers to represent a kind of original stage in history, a suspension of the “normality” of institutions, in which we could see more clearly under which prerequisites one would be willing to subject himself or herself to the social contract, and in which not. Focusing on the *Ancien Régime*, then no one would submit to the arbitrary power of a despotic regime -they believed- but only to the law agreed by free and equal subjects, more or less what we would call nowadays a democracy. It is not by chance that the pandemic has been seen as a “[total social fact](#)”, “inaugural experience”, moment for a “[new social contract](#)”, a “[reconstruction deal](#)”.

Empty streets, parks and squares, beaches and airports, are samples of this suspensive moment of the social deal. This is the purpose, for example, of the collaborative project “[Closed for holidays. Portrait of a tourist void](#)”, by José Antonio Mansilla and Sergi Yanes, which collects pictures of various tourism destinations, usually flooded by visitors, now deserted. Thus, we can see “tourism spaces, not as unproductive spheres” but open to alternative forms of social production. An exceptional spot of a [tourism society in reset](#), in a state of nature, is the Balearic Islands. It is an extreme case of a tourist region in Europe: until 2020, [tourism represented 45% of GDP, 28.7% of employment](#), with a ratio of 16 tourists for each resident.

In June 2020, after months of locked airspace and under official state of alarm still in force, first tourists, exempt from covid tests or sanitary quarantine, arrived in Palma. The magazine *Diagnóstico Cultura* wondered whether this was not a prove of a “[touristocracy](#)”. Surprisingly, this term has no tradition in tourism studies, and it has barely been used in the media (as it is the case for *touristcracy* and *touristocracy*). Few places are as conducive as the Balearic Islands to test what a touristocracy may look like and whether the pandemic has triggered a disclosing effect of the social deal underlying a tourism society.

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## The touristocratic regime

The already [spasmodic behaviour of Spanish tourism economy](#) is heightened in the Balearic case. Spasms, “booms”, have followed one another like a cycle, with ups and downs, whereas the spread of the tourism frontier, amalgamated with the real estate business, has been colonizing diverse spatial niches. In the last of the booms, the archipelago reached one of the most intense airbnbifications worldwide. The cycled sequence has been also accompanied by alerts about negative environmental and social effects of overtourism, danger of oversupply, and vulnerability caused by what is popularly said “putting all your eggs in one basket”. As a result, different regulations have been enacted in the frame of a never-ending dispute about the “tourism model”. As shown in table 1, at a decisive moment (until 2017) a kind of social deal was settled around tourism containment, and the pool of authorised tourist beds kept almost frozen. For two decades, all the presidents of the regional Govern, conservative or progressive, have publicly defended the need to diversify the economic model. However, as official figures show, the number of tourists has steadily grown.

Since 2014, hand in hand with the Airbnb boom, public debate and political agenda have focused on the question of overtourism. In 2017, a new regulating scheme was settled, which entailed zoning, fining criteria and ruling the allocation of tourist beds. It served to draw –but not to set legally- a new “ceiling”, a tourist cap–, well above the previous deal. Altogether, it meant a massive regularization-cum-amnesty of a major part of the hitherto non-authorised supply, particularly in holiday rental (which already represents a third of authorised total beds), banned so far in multi-family homes. The increase of authorised tourist beds in the last decade (2010-2020) reaches 35%, concentrated in the last 5 years, under a left-wing regional government. Second home tourism and undeclared business add an additional 30% of visitors to the ceiling of authorised beds.

The heated controversy around holiday rental is not accidental. Balearic Islands beat all [negative records in access to housing](#), [rising prices](#), with 4.98% of the total housing stock being employed by tourist use, which reaches 20% and 30% in some municipalities. As a whole, it multiplies by 5 the pressure in, for instance, [the province of Barcelona](#). To the effects on the residential housing market, we must add those typical of urban gentrification processes, but also those of rural gentrifi-

cation and environmental impacts related to rural tourist use –in water or energy consumption, tertiarisation of rustic land, and so on. In addition, topics about the sharing economy have been refuted in the Balearics, thanks to data provided by various neighbourhood and environmental organizations, which have shown massive fraud, *uberized* labour, and concentration of supply ([a single local super-host managed near 900 homes just in Airbnb](#), and [Homeaway rented about 24,000](#)). A new business stratum linked to the tourism exploitation of houses added to what has been described as “[hotel aristocracy](#)”. Altogether with their peers in other links in the tourism value chain –tour operators, builders, airlines, etc.– they compose a local, yet national and transnational integrated, *tourism-real estate oligarchy*.

Table 1.

**Evolution of main tourist indicators in the Balearic Islands.**

		Autorised Tourist Beds	Tourist Arrivals (millions)
First boom	1959	14,609	0.32
	1974	227,406	3.17
Second boom	1978	226,883	3.80
	1989	348,019	6.42
Third boom	1993	381,108	6.88
	2008	423,054	12.58
Forth boom	2011	421,782	12.29
	2015	424,663	14.01
Nueva Ley Turística	2017	552,680	16.33
	2018	575,196	16.59
Tourist Cap	2019	623,624	16.45

Valdivielso & Moranta (2019). Data adapted from Murray et al. (2017) and updated from the Tourist Strategy Agency of the Balearic Islands (AETIB)



## COVID-19 shakes the regime

As it is a common place in states of crises, the arrival of the COVID in February has been a disclosing moment for some of the features of the tourism regime. From the very beginning, the strain between movements to prioritize public health and those to prioritize the tourism business became clear; and the tension within the oligarchy itself between those with a [maximalist](#) stance to reduce risks and those with a [minimalist](#) position to deny them. Once the air and maritime space were closed and lockdown imposed, the economy paralyzed, various strata of the tourism regime mobilized in a *front for the new normality*. They had three challenges ahead: to obtain new regulatory measures and direct subsidies from the authorities; to isolate tourism from COVID, both in the sense of minimizing the risk of a contagion that could spoil the destination brand, and in the sense of denying that tourism was a vector of transmission; and to achieve direct management as a region towards international tourism issuing markets, and a comparative advantage as a “safe destination”.

Pressure to relax and suspend urban, tourism, fiscal, labour and environmental regulations was immediate. It did not acknowledge those sectors that maintained the tourism society while in reset -health, social services, agriculture and local industry, education, etc.-, where the Balearic islands are at the bottom in national rankings as a consequence of the tourism-real estate monoculture (i.e., it is the [Spanish region with the lowest rate of primary care physicians](#)). On the contrary, spurred by a group of [conservative mayors](#), the oligarchy ([construction companies](#), [hoteliers](#), [small and medium-sized companies](#), [holiday rentals](#), [travel agencies](#) lobbies...) united against the regulatory framework, advocating for traveling subsidies, suspending the tourist tax, and cross-deregulation to start a rapid recovery through the same recipe used in past cyclical crises: cement and tourism.

Furthermore, “back to normality” became itself a discursive device, a narrative, with practical but no less symbolic effects. To typical official promotional campaigns and mottos such as “You cannot travel, but you can dream”, #SeeYouSoonMallorca or [StayHomeMallorca](#), the explicit message of “[We do not have a systemic crisis; it is a stoppage of the productive sectors that requires action from governments](#)” was added. Among the practical effects, the aim was to put pressure for [tourist rescue plans](#) at the regional, national and European levels. No less it aimed at winning the narrative of expectations: the oligarchy publicly censured anyone who seemed

slightly sceptical about the salvation of the 2020 tourist season, and did not hesitate to charge against [European authorities](#), [ministers](#), and the [Spanish Prime Minister](#). All was about denying the reality principle, and keeping alive the dream of normality, at any cost.

Faced with pressures from a large spectrum of stakeholders to call an emergency [round table](#), the regional executive split into two parallel movements: while, on the one hand, a Regional Reactivation Plan with elements of a “green agenda” was presented in open meetings; Tourism counsellor met behind closed doors with the regime’s oligarchy, including international agents such as TUI, and cooked a Decree of urgent measures (Law 8/2020) that was immediately approved. At the wake of some other [Autonomous Communities](#) under conservative governments, although far from the extremes of [Andalusia](#) and [Madrid](#), it entailed a huge regulatory relaxation, including the possibility of expanding tourist establishments, or building without a license, among other measures. To make up for this [strategy focused on construction](#) and promoted with delusional predictions, the executive was forced to approve a Decree (9/2020) of territorial protection, also sold with unrealistic figures, as it was then [denounced by the environmental NGO Terraferida](#). While the islands insisted on the recipes of the past –cement and tourism–, cities like [Amsterdam](#) or [Milan](#) announced ambitious ecological transition projects.

Once the lockdown was lifted, a [promotional campaign](#) through a pilot plan for “[safe air corridors](#)” was launched in June. The oligarchy searched support from European lobbies in countries like Germany, which were at first little responsive to regain mobility with a country like Spain -in a far worse health situation-. [Pressure of a group of German businessmen and residents](#) in Mallorca, well received by the [Spanish Minister of Transport](#), also helped. And thus, tourist activity gradually recovered, marked by images of [tourists](#), [airlines](#), and [airports](#) skipping health measures, that were already more lax than in neighbouring countries. So, contagion figures increased rapidly with the return to activity, what was the beginning of a second wave of the pandemic. Then, the [tourism sector declared itself exempted from all responsibility](#), even when [authorities responsible to manage the pandemic](#) pointed to the lack of control at airports, and the need to quarantine tourists. When half of Europe began to impose restrictions on passengers from Spain, and tour operators such as TUI suspended bookings, the strategy to impose the narrative and deny reality was radicalized, to the point that the tourism lobby called for the [immediate](#)

[resignation of Fernando Simón](#), coordinator of the national health strategy, for having celebrated the restrictions on mobility in the United Kingdom or Belgium, where the incidence of the virus was much higher than in Spain, including the Balearic Islands. The oligarchy repressed any message stating that tourism could be a risk for public health. *Primum turistae, deinde publica salutem*.

## The future of the touristocratic regime

If in the first wave the Balearic Islands could exhibit moderate figures of covid incidence, in the second the infection rates were the highest in the country, mainly in *Les Pitiüses* –Formentera and Ibiza–. Whilst an [indisputable lack of control at the airports](#), the entire archipelago became a “red zone” for European authorities. Therefore, tourist season was ruined. As a result, provisional data point to a drop close to 90% in main tourism indicators (number of visitors, tourist-led income, etc.); a collapse in annual [regional GDP of -31%](#), being the Spanish region with the highest fall (it triples the country’s average of -11%), and, probably in the EU; and [half of the workforce faced to subsidised layoff or unemployment](#). So, all hopes were focused on [vaccination](#). Voices soon raised in favour of [vaccinating workers in the tourism sector as a priority](#). Just in case, AENA took advantage of that moment to start a [covert expansion of Palma airport capacity](#), that prompted the [symbolic rejection of the Balearic Parliament](#).

Various experts in tourism studies, such as [Mansilla](#) and [Tolo Deyà](#), have been warning that we are on the verge of a process of restructuring and concentration of the tourism business, from complementary supply to hotel chains, as a result of the pandemic. The lack of liquidity not only suffocates family businesses, but, as Ismael Yrigoy (2020) has shown in his study on Meliá company, the hotel oligarchy is also integrated into a complex transnational corporate and financial network, and now they face a [window of opportunity for fat cats](#). Transactions of tourism assets have exploded in *les Illes*, where opportunistic funds such as [Blackstone have already landed](#). In this context, the [Govern has hired the accounting corporation KPMG](#), with its extensive record in corruption, to coordinate the rescue strategy for the local tourism sector thanks to the European Recovery Fund. Balearics’ hotel companies (Riusa, Meliá Hotels, Barceló Hotels, etc.), which [doubled their profits in the background of the overtourism boom](#), and over-all a tireless oligarchy when it comes to

opposing taxes take advantage of the “private profit, public debt” principle (it must be remembered that tax pressure in Spain, 35%, is up to 11 points lower than that of a neighbouring and also tourist country like France).

In this context, the debate on [economic diversification and the change of model](#) has reopened, though its echoes can hardly compete with the mantra of recovery and the new normality. Even very influential economists, such as [Antoni Riera](#) and [Carles Manera](#), have suggested reducing the number of tourists and / or tourist beds, yet without abandoning continuous growth (in value, in wealth, but not in volume). The degrowth talk continues to be denigrated and associated with tourismphobia in the prevailing discourse, after having been the key in the debate on overtourism and de-touristization. Prominent political and social actors who now lament the costs of tourism monoculture had celebrated few years ago the Airbnb-led growth and the massive regularization of short term rentals explained above. Even now, during the first year of the pandemic (2021), the [Consell of Mallorca has continued to allocate new tourism licenses for a hundred establishments](#) –as it has being denounced by Terraferida–; Palma city council continues to give [licenses for new accommodations](#) –as it has being denounced by the Federation of Neighbours–; and [hotel companies announce](#), as if nothing happened, that they will enter the holiday rental business niche. Actually, during the pandemic, demand for [isolated second homes](#) and [traffic of private jets](#) have skyrocketed in the Balearic. The transition from “over-tourism to non-tourism” does not allow for future predictions, as Pau Obrador (2020) says, but signals point to a new *bubble tourism* niche, exclusive also from the health point of view, which the [Government of the Canary Islands](#) is already campaigning for. These events are not accidental, as none of the emergency regulations enacted in this period considered measures to attack the causes of tourism-real estate dependency.

### **Touristocracy: the social deal for vulnerability**

The fact that this pandemic crisis is in its origin an [ecological crisis](#) -the viral zoonosis originates in the loss of ecosystems and biodiversity- and that global hyper-connectivity has accelerated its transmission, makes economy an obvious co-responsible not only of causing but also of spreading the virus. From a degrowth perspective –that one warning for decades that either it is done voluntarily, orderly and fairly, or it will be in any case a forced, abrupt and chaotic degrowth– this crisis shows

what happens to [a growth society without growth](#), and anticipates what will happen on a larger scale caused by [climate change](#). In this crossroads, governments suffer of cognitive dissonance: while they [design ecological transition plans](#), they [rescue carboniferous sectors](#), from oil companies to airlines. Tourism is one of them. And the Balearic insular, Mediterranean geography makes it almost totally dependent on global air mobility, and at the same time especially vulnerable to global warming.

Ismael Yebra (2018) has defined *turismocracia* as a “totalitarian and dictatorial way of governing” in which tourism interests prevail over rights. In the case of the Balearic Islands, it is confirmed that under a touristocracy not everyone enjoys the same rights. Touristocratic oligarchy is “more equal than others”, and they show it off. Touristocracy requires also coercion, included a functional integration that acts as a spider’s web from which it does not seem possible to get out without huge social costs; but not less, as Margaret Thatcher said, it requires “to change the soul”: it has to be agreed and loved, [it presupposes the faith of the believer](#). However, as we have seen, there are also democratic counterbalance mechanisms, more or less effective depending on the case. In addition, there are many subjects at different scales, not only governments, making decisions, and they experience tensions, contradictions, splits.

The instance of the Balearic Islands under the COVID illustrates this typical schizophrenia of a tourism society. The sociologist Ulrich Beck (1998 [1988]) coined the expression “organized irresponsibility” to refer to the immanent contradiction of a system that generates dangers that cannot be attacked because no one can be accused or held responsible. In a tourism society, this danger is one of an extreme and growing vulnerability, but those who are primarily responsible can be identified. Whether [mass tourism has died](#), or [the post-pandemic transition lasts for years](#), or a “new normality” is reached, it is not wise to plan the future on almost total dependence on a single economic sector upheld on global hypermobility. The lesson taught by the pandemic reset is that touristocracy is the Old Regime and that the 21st century demands a new social deal.

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## A FEMINIST VIEW OF THE COVID-19 CRISIS AND TOURISM

Núria Abellan, Carla Izcara, Marta Salvador<sup>24</sup>

The COVID-19 crisis is observed from diverse points of view taking into account its implications in fields as varied as economy, health, labour market or any other aspect of society. Despite this, and as always, **it is necessary to broaden the perspectives towards gender**, both due to the differentiated impacts of this crisis and the contributions of the diverse feminist approaches. This allows for the analysis of the consequences of COVID-19 taking into account the intersections of gender, race, age, [social class](#) or the fact of being part of the [LGBTIQ community](#), among others. During the pandemic, one of the crucial aspects has been **the gender difference in experiencing the situation of the lockdown**, a moment in which [houses have become a political space](#), showing the inequalities of power that shape them. There is also a growing concern for [women that have to remain at home with their aggressor](#), who [uses violence and abuses them](#) when there are fewer possibilities to report and to initiate protocols. Moreover, the sexual and reproductive rights of women have also been affected during the pandemic.

It is necessary to consider a general overload for women because of the shutting down of schools, the increase in global domestic and care work of sick or dependant relatives. For this reason, **the care sector needs to be considered essential**, a situation that is aggravated in the case of [single mothers](#) or [mothers with the custody of their children](#). At the same time, teleworking is added, becoming one of the proposals materialized to continue with productive tasks and to avoid layoffs. Usually, [women devote more than double hours than men to domestic tasks](#), which is worsened by the current overload in the context of the pandemic. At this moment, family logistics are reorganized leading to a foreseeable [loss of salary](#) or high probabilities to lose the job for working mothers. Meanwhile, some voices affirm that [this crisis may provoke certain changes to the traditional gender roles in the long term](#), although in the current context it is so complicated to investigate, especially in field-

24 Núria Abellan, Carla Izcara and Marta Salvador are licensed in Tourism Studies by CETT-UB (School of Tourism, Hospitality and Gastronomy which is affiliated to the Barcelona University) and Alba Sud collaborators. This article was published in Alba Sud on June 12, 2020.



work. Thus, empirical questions and impacts driving from this pandemic will take longer to go public.

The feminisation of care work is also translated to the labour market and affects professionals such as house workers who are mainly migrant women, employees in the cleaning and sanitation, supermarket employees, social workers, and health professionals with [70% of female nurses](#). These [jobs are usually precarious](#), with low salaries and [atypical contracts](#) (part-time, temporary or externalized) that increase the economic, working and social insecurity of women. This is, **a crisis where women have the main health and care burden, but not the same possibility to make decisions** since the management boards of institutions are highly masculinised.

Another consequence of the pandemic is the profound effects on the global economy, as the virus has obliged to stop the production considered non-basic. For this reason, diverse decisions have been made around the world to mitigate the COVID-19 crisis, some of which exclude plenty of workers from the social protections planned, such as the [740 million workers around the world that are part of the informal economy](#).

### **Which have been the impacts on the workers of the tourism sector?**

The tourism sector has been acutely affected due to the limitations in international mobility and social distancing measures. The closing of tourism accommodations, restaurants and cultural facilities has generated [a massive wave of definitive and temporal layoffs](#) through ERTO (Expedient of Regulation of Temporal Occupation). This sector outstands a **high feminisation of job positions** and, thus, the decrease in occupation has a clear gender repercussion. For this reason, it is necessary to analyse the impacts from a gender perspective.

Firstly, in the past few years, precarity in the labour market has generally increased, especially in the tourism sector. Tourism work is characterized by the hard-working conditions, informality, low wages and the externalization of entire departments, particularly affecting female workers. An increment of temporal and new modalities of labour such as independent workers is seen, adding to the instability of employees, reducing their saving capacity and access to grants, and hardening their possibilities to overcome the current economic shock. Therefore, **the crisis deriving from COVID-19 has demonstrated even more the precarity and vul-**

**nerability of the sector, as well as the existent gender inequalities.** The context where we are [positions many women, with special regard to young, low-qualified, migrants or afro descendent women](#), in a situation of maximum vulnerability.

A clear case is [housekeepers](#), many of whom are unprotected when facing massive layoffs, as it is a department where externalization prevails. Against the shutting down of hotels and the slowing of labour activity, all the multiservice companies that have benefited from the [externalization processes favoured by the labour reform of 2012 in Spain](#), have extinguished their contracts, the majority of them being temporal. This **has left the workers without access to the measures foreseen by the Government to alleviate the economic impacts**, such as ERTO, which have concentrated in workers with permanent contracts and, in some cases, discontinuous contracts hired directed by hotels too. During this pandemic, the importance of good cleaning and sanitation has been proven, tasks traditionally undermined and invisible, despite the efforts of the collective of *kellys* that nowadays still fight to achieve their own space and being present in the Spanish political debate. Despite the public recognition of their work and the increase in the value of cleaning tasks, this is still one of the more affected and unprotected collectives in this crisis. Moreover, when these workers go back to their job positions, they will be highly exposed to contagion while they develop the key function of sanitizing. In this process, [they claim being facilitated measures of protection and enough time to develop their job correctly and safely](#), since hygiene and sanitation protocols will be even more demanding and important in order to ensure the safety of staff and tourists. Despite this, the most probable scenario is to give more workload to fewer personnel, with the clear intention of reducing costs. This way, workers may suffer the diminishing of their negotiation power with the companies and the growth of their labour insecurity.

Among other collectives that are suffering the stoppage of tourism are, for instance, **hostesses** deeply affected by the slow recuperation of congresses and events, but also because of the eventual contracts that leave them out of the protection measures planned. On the other hand, due to the stagnation of commercial flights, **flight attendances** have also been affected. Another collective, usually forgotten and undermined in the tourism industry despite its great importance is the one formed by **nightlife workers**, such as artists, dancers or entertainers, among others. **The cultural sector**, closely related to tourism, may suffer the consequences of receiving

fewer visitors and the reduced capacity in spaces such as heritage facilities, theme festivals, etc., affecting customer service, tourist guides, cultural programmers, cleaning and sanitation staff or food and beverage personnel. Finally, other workers in the tourism sector such as **food and beverage** or **hotel receptions** that maintain their jobs will be in contact with other people, exposing themselves to the possibility of [contracting the virus](#).

However, **the influence of the technological development** on the task of receptionists needs to be considered, since it may guarantee better work conditions or provoke the loss of job positions. At the same time, the increment in the use of technology in tourism, together with the reduction of mobility, may put in risk the role of travel agents and, therefore, the work of many women who will now have a new specialisation in a competitive market that is also in detriment of on-site attention. In this new context, technologies are even more important in touristic experiences and, thus, in the labour market. Traditionally, the jobs related to technology are masculinised, which may bring difficulties to women to insert in this market, fact that is also known as the [third gender digital divide](#).

On the other hand, many families depended on seasonal jobs and, currently, without a prevision on how the summer season will be, do not know how to survive, a situation even more stressed in the case of jobs in small tourism businesses. In consequence, **the high number of job positions occupied by women will aggravate their economic dependence** on fathers, brothers or partners, creating an even more unequal relationship.

Lastly, the impacts of the “new normal” will affect all the women that work in **family businesses** in the tourism sector, who already suffered an overload of the combination of attending tourists and being responsible for the care work. With the new requirements on hygiene, sanitation and social distancing they will see their workload increased because the support networks present until the moment are now gone. To this factor, the danger of exposing their household to possible infections is added, a preoccupation that may impact negatively on their mental health.

### **Teleworking and care work, how are they combined?**

Despite the option of teleworking may have been well received by a great number of groups, including the complications it entails, in the case of the service sector

and specifically in tourism, this option is available for some positions, since **a great number of job positions cannot be developed unless on-site**. Among the possibilities of teleworking are included the jobs as travel agents, managing bookings and cancellations of travels; as tour operators, controlling touristic packages that will mainly have stopped; as event organisers, looking for new dates and alternatives for the events; as marketing experts and community managers, designing and developing campaigns to attract tourists or generate loyalty during lockdown; in technological companies, offering support through informatics programs. Even though there is no precise data on the gender of those developing the tasks mentioned, emphasising the feminisation of tourism, it becomes obvious that women are more affected by the presence of teleworking and the balancing of these tasks with the domestic ones. A clear example is one of the female investigators who due to the work overload have [reduced the number of articles and scientific papers](#), despite being able to work from home.

### **What may be the contributions of the gender perspective to the new tourism scenario?**

In the current situation of reduced mobility and economic recession, diverse proximity tourisms are recuperated and given more value, such as second residence, social, interior, [slow tourism](#) or [staycation](#). This last trend, according to its strictest definition, is based on not going abroad for vacations and staying at home enjoying leisure activities to close destinations without spending the night out. Although it is established as an alternative form of tourism in this limited mobility scenario, it is necessary to keep in mind that staying in the usual residence during holidays, **might imply a work overload for women**, involving more tiredness for not being at home all day long and having to deliver all those tasks within fewer hours than usual.

The same problem may arise with **other forms of tourism**, which can also be reinforced in a context where foreseeably those who travel will need to cut the expenses. Firstly, there is the option of motorhomes, bungalows, camping caravans, apartments instead of hotels, hostels, or similar formulae, where the people using these services have to be in charge of aspects such as food and cleaning, tasks that are mainly assumed by women. Secondly, there are initiatives like the exchange of houses between two families that travel or housesitting, when the person travelling

stays in the home of the owners freely as long as they maintain it, which may perpetuate the traditional gender roles. Lastly, other forms of travelling that involve more workload for women are mountain trips where shelters are the chosen accommodation, bicycle or walking routes, such as the Way of St James. In these cases, the work overload may be due to the most invisible tasks, such as the planning of the trip, the activities and pauses that will take place; the preparation of the material to go on the trip; taking into account the wishes and desires of all the participants; the supervision during the trip, among others. All these mental freights derived from the care work may be applied to the other examples mentioned above.

In this scenario where access to tourism and leisure will be even more of a privilege and a factor causing inequalities and social stratification, it is fundamental to display tourism alternatives that are more equitable, undermined until now, such as **social tourism**. [Social tourism appears as a more inclusive, supportive, and equitable alternative](#), which grants access to tourism for all the population and a better distribution of benefits, while promoting interior tourism and redistributing tourism flows to less crowded areas. In these tourism initiatives, profit is not the main goal, but it is rather linked to pedagogic, personal development or educative objectives, among others. An example of the possible beneficiaries of this initiative may be **single parent families** who, by nature, count with one less salary. Therefore, they may now have to discard vacations with the aim of reducing expenses, bearing in mind that it will be complicated to guarantee summer camps. This way, it is necessary to consider **which tourism modalities can be adapted to the current needs** and critically read who they give access to and who they exclude, since from this pandemic we have seen the absolute fragility of the traditional tourism model linked to consumption mentality and highly dependent on international tourism.

## Final thoughts

Thinking of the social recuperation it is indispensable to put gender equality at the heart of the question and give importance to female empowerment, which can create [healthier, more resilient and cohesive communities](#) in times of crisis. From this idea, [alternative models of development](#) are claimed, such as **ecofeminism**, which focus on people and the planet and defend human rights, food sovereignty, climatic justice and water. This last natural resource has a direct relation with tourism and

gender, especially in Global South countries where difficulties to access water affect women more in terms of health and supply tasks (Cole et al., 2020).

It seems obvious that, during this pandemic and focusing on possible solutions, gender perspective has been one of the neglected aspects of most of the cases. [The consequences of leaving apart the contributions of diverse feminist approaches](#) can derive in extending gender inequalities, reinforcing traditional gender roles, or strengthening structural barriers that cause systemic consequences, so that neoliberal and benefit logics imposed nowadays must be questioned. Therefore, from the tourism sector, this is the moment to focus on sustainability and boost for new modalities of tourism that allow us to start working to guarantee the labour rights and the programmes of social protection, the flexibilization of labour contracts with the aim of reconciling care works without reinforcing precarity and the social valorisation and visibility of empowerment processes of workers who develop essential tasks. In this framework of analysis of the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis and tourism, we have the opportunity to reduce the environmental effects and to minimize negative impacts of tourism on the local population, while establishing horizontal relationships between managers, local communities and public authorities, etc. Definitely, it is the moment to apply a gender perspective in the present and future of the tourism sector.

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## COVID-19 IN CANCÚN: EPIDEMIC AND VULNERABILITY IN A WORLD-CLASS TOURIST DESTINATION

Cristina Oehmichen & Concepción Escalona<sup>25</sup>

Tourism has placed Mexico among the ten most visited countries in the world. This is why it is considered as a [world-class tourism country](#). The state of Quintana Roo, where Cancun is located, is responsible for one-third of the international tourist arrivals in Mexico. Just looking at the data we can see how important it is: from January to November 2019, [22.8 million people arrived in Quintana Roo by plane and 7.2 million by cruise ship](#), leaving 15 billion dollars. 63.4% of the visitors were foreigners and 36.6% nationals. Most of the foreign tourists came from the United States (47.8%) and Canada (14.1%); 25.0% corresponded to people from other issuing countries, especially from Europe and Asia. 2.8% came from Colombia, 2.7% from Argentina and the rest from elsewhere.

Before the pandemic, the year 2020 was expected to have a similar or greater influx of tourists than previous ones. This generated a complex crisis that proves the articulation of tourism with a wide range of interconnected and globally interdependent activities and processes.

The first effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in Quintana Roo had a great deal of media attention. Before the first case of an infected person was reported, the alarms went off. On the 26th of February, [an MSC Meraviglia cruise ship docked in Cozumel](#), after being rejected by Jamaica and Grand Cayman Island to allow 4500 passengers and 1500 crew members to disembark on their ports, due to a suspected case of coronavirus. The cruise's request caused a protest of thirty inhabitants that wanted to stop the disembarkation, although it was later found in a health inspection that the sick person had no COVID.

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They were looking forward to Easter in all tourist destinations in Quintana Roo. In Cancun, Isla Mujeres and Puerto Morelos in the north, the Riviera Maya (which includes Playa del Carmen and Tulum), in the two cruise landing ports (Cozumel and Mahahual) and Bacalar, the hoteliers, tour operators, restaurateurs, tour guides, drivers, taxi drivers and other workers were awaiting for tourists arrivals, since Easter is one of the highest seasons. But in fact, this never happened.

From the beginning of March, the first COVID-19 effects could be seen. Cancun airport drastically reduced its operations. Between 550 and 580 daily flights were expected to arrive during Easter, but since the beginning of March, the arrivals were already reduced to only 200. By April, the number of flights was reduced by 80%, with nearly one million passengers no longer expected to arrive. Cozumel airport also experienced a drop in March, as it stopped mobilizing more than 30,000 passengers and ceased operations in April.

Flight cancellations caused a domino effect that disturbed the entire production chain, as tourists stopped arriving, leading to the closure of hotels, restaurants, museums, theme parks, department stores and visits to archaeological sites, among many other activities.

In this article, we explore the first COVID-19 pandemic effects in one of the cities specifically designed for tourism development: Cancun. We used interviews with tourism workers, as well as a literature review and the application of an electronically taken questionnaire during the pandemic between 26 March and 30 April 2020, as resources to elaborate it.

### **Cancun: world-class tourist destination**

Cancun is a city specifically created for tourism, built in a sparsely inhabited region, and made up of a set of small islands. In 1974 it began operating as an “integrally planned” tourist destination, built and promoted by the federal government. Since then, it has steadily grown to become the most important tourist destination in Mexico and Latin America. Since its creation, Cancun has had a hotel zone where you can find luxury hotels, prestigious brand shops, restaurants, spas, museums and nine golf courses with spectacular views. In a separate space, far enough from the hotel zone and out of the sight of tourists, the popular settlements where the workers and their families live can be found. There are also irregular settlements where the new

immigrants are accommodated trying to make out of Cancun their usual place of residence; These urban complexes are known as “regions” and “superblocks”.

Cancun is a city of contrasts with a very marked economic and social [polarization](#). The hotel complex is clearly distinguished from the colonies where the local population lives. There is also an intermediate space located in the city centre where you can find residential areas, government offices, hospitals, notaries’ offices, department stores, self-service shops, restaurants and other businesses.

The hotel area is 21 kilometres long along the coastline, in such a way that all hotels are overlooking the turquoise blue sea. Only guests can exclusively enjoy this view since they have practically managed to monopolize access to most of the beaches. Hotels, golf courses, restaurants, stores, shops and services focused on tourism, as well as some luxury residential complexes, exclusive, closed and with security systems, can be found in the area. Far from the tourist zone, in the countryside, is where the settlement places for workers, unemployed and immigrants are located. Through this urban structure, original planners tried to prevent unregulated growth from invading the tourist area. When tourists arrive from the airport to the hotel complex, they do not need to go through the popular colonies. They are far from their range of vision and it seems as if they were arriving in a completely different country.

Cancun has been surprisingly successful. It soon became the leading tourist destination in Mexico and Latin America due to the beauty of its beaches, the cultural wealth represented by archaeological zones and sites of historical interest, and its high connectivity with direct flights to 187 airports around the world.

Cancun’s success attracted new tourism investment, which expanded south. Along the Cancun-Tulum highway, new hotels and resorts were installed in a long coastal area, which receives the name of “Riviera Maya”, a current internationally recognized brand.

The “Riviera Maya” is home to numerous natural attractions, such as fine sand beaches and a turquoise sea, which are part of the Mesoamerican Reef System (MAR) [an ecosystem of approximately 1000 km long located in the Caribbean Sea](#), the second largest coral reef in the world. It also has cenotes and crystal clear seas in which you can swim with multi-coloured fishes, as well as cultural attractions, such as interesting archaeological sites and museums, including the [Mayan Museum of Cancun](#), the Underwater Museum of Art (MUSA), as well such as the Sayab Plane-

tariums in Playa del Carmen and Ka'Yoc' in Cancun. Playa del Carmen is located in the Riviera Maya, a city that in the past used to be a small fishing village. Its main street is called "Quinta Avenida", where international shops and the Playacar complex can be found, which is a closed area with hotels, houses and luxury flats. Playa del Carmen also counts with a ferry dock for transfers to the Cozumel island.

In the Riviera Maya, you can also find the town of Tulum, where one of the main tourist attractions is the late post-classic archaeological zone called Tulum (which means "fence" or "hedge" in the Mayan language). This city used to be an important port, a commercial and pilgrimage centre. Some of the buildings are built honouring the Descending God identified with the deity of corn. Likewise, another of its structures is believed to be created in honour of the God of the Wind (Velázquez Morlet, 2002). In Tulum, there is also a Mayan Sanctuary in honour of the Talking Cross, whose cult began during the Mayan social movement of the 19th century, known as "War of the Castes" (Sullivan, 2002). In the Riviera Maya there are also some other closed tourist and real estate developments, such as Puerto Aventuras. As well as the Xcaret, Xel-Há and Xoximilco theme parks, which belong to a Mexican business group known as "Grupo Xcaret" and the Vidanta theme park, where the Canadian company *Cirque du Soleil's* show is permanently hired.

The success of Cancun and the Riviera Maya, however, is not only due to their natural beauties. Its prosperity must also be attributed to the facilities that the Mexican State has granted to investors. Since the 1970s, the government in charge has used the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) to finance infrastructure and hotel projects. Likewise, facilities were granted to investors, including Mexican magnates and politicians, who were authorized [to build large hotels and resorts on the dunes and mangroves](#), including areas with archaeological remains. Another additional incentive is the abundant, very cheap, multi-purpose and disciplined labour force from all over Mexico, but mainly from the Mayan area of Quintana Roo and the State of Yucatan.

### **Multitask workers and social security**

It is difficult to make a clear distinction between workers in formal and informal employment because, in either case, it is a very cheap, multi-purpose and precarious workforce.

Cancun and the Riviera Maya are where the main hotel chains are located, [predominantly Spanish and American ones](#), including Riu, Barceló, Oasis, Meliá, Iberostar, Palladium, Marriot, Hard Rock, Royal Holiday, Holiday Inn, Fiesta Americana, Wyndham, Ritz and Club Méditerranée, among others. Although these hotel chains have permanent personnel, with regular jobs, most of the workers have temporary employment contracts, which places them in a situation of vulnerability to fluctuations between employment and unemployment periods.

Hotels work with an intensive schedules system locally known as “segmented schedules”. Supervisors and managers accommodate employees according to their performance. Thus, those who are more productive are assigned to the “peak hours”, when there is greater movement of visitors and greater opportunities to receive tips for their services. Workers who show lower productivity are assigned to the quietest hours. They receive little tips and can get easily fired. Ideally, working shifts should be eight hours long, but in practice, people intensively work up to 10 or 12 hours: “there we all know that in hospitality you will never work eight [hours] but at least 10. In fact, managers work 12 hours per day”. On peak tourist days, workers can spend the whole shift without taking a lunch break: “If you have a busy day, you just don’t eat,” says one worker who requested anonymity.

Most of the workers, both in Cancun and the Riviera Maya, live in popular colonies and “support towns” that are far from the hotel areas. In many cases, hotels provide free transportation to their workers, thus avoiding the creation of irregular settlements in their proximities, in addition to achieving a reduction in the tax payment, since supporting transportation is considered a social action that benefits the community.

Although the workers are unionized, their organizations operate more as employment boards and as structures for the control and discipline of the workforce. It is shocking that in the reported data about labour disputes, there have been zero strikes in the last ten years (INEGI 2015).

Hoteliers try to avoid labour commitments with their employees and they are supported by the government to such a thing. For example, to prevent a worker from accumulating seniority and acquiring rights, he or she must sign a contract for four months’ work and one month’s rest. This is known as the “four-by-one system”. By doing so, hoteliers manage to avoid various responsibilities, such as compensation payments for occupational diseases, or pension payments for retirement and elder-

ly unemployment. This recruitment form particularly affects housekeepers, who over the years tend to develop various musculoskeletal diseases, as demonstrated by Cañada (2015). If over the years a worker wants to claim an occupational disease pension, he or she will not be able to do so, as there is no employer to sue or be held liable for the disease. The workers are therefore completely helpless.

Another way for hoteliers to maximize their profits and reduce the cost of labour is by outsourcing as many work processes as possible, where responsibilities to workers are shifted to shell companies or companies that are born and disappear overnight. Many of the tasks required by hotels are managed by these types of contractors who take on multiple tasks, including maintenance, laundry, gardening and security.

The majority earns a small salary, which in several cases is supplemented by tips from tourists, or the payment of a small commission. With this system, workers can increase their income according to the activities they perform, the work they do and the type of tourist they serve. They often prefer domestic and American tourists as they tend to leave tips, but not the ones from Spain, who usually don't give them anything. This happens because tourists act according to previous experiences in their home country and in the case of Spain, workers have an income that does not depend on tips from customers or tourists.

Outside the hotels, there is a wide range of formal and informal workers, who perform different activities: such as drivers, taxi drivers, motorcyclists, shop and warehouse employees, waiters, gallopers, car washers, tour guides, tour and craft sellers, time-share, tourists package, as well as singers, musicians, dancers, domestic workers and other trades. Some of them receive a salary, others just a commission or in some cases just a tip.

Many casual workers do not receive a salary, instead, they pay to work. This is the case of the porters who assist tourists at the airport and help them carry their bags, drive them to the taxi or assist people in wheelchairs. They do not receive a salary and, instead, must pay a fee to some minor official or intermediary in order to be allowed to work. As everywhere in Mexico, employees who work in shopping malls packaging goods, or help find parking lots, as well as car washers, pay for their work. In all these cases, the tips are all the income they have to survive without any other resources. Airport drivers, for example, receive a salary of 150 pesos per day (about \$ 8 for an eight-hour shift), but the reduced salary is compensated by tips

from tourists. Therefore, the first thing a tourist sees when he gets into the taxi is a sign in which the driver thanks him for the tip he voluntarily wants to leave.

In the case of the waiters who work in different restaurants, the salary is also very low and is complemented by the customers' tips. It is already established that the waiter gives 8% of the bill to the manager or owner of the restaurant, and he keeps only 2% of the tips. Even if the customer does not leave a tip, the waiter is obliged to give 8% of the total amount, which he must pay out of his own pocket.

All these jobs, both in the regular and casual sectors, represent forms of labour abuse that push workers to the limits of subsistence, resulting in a lack of savings and poor nutrition, making them highly vulnerable to the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The workers' living conditions contrast with the luxury of the Cancun touristic area. This polarization limits the [building of community](#) and a sense of belonging while enhancing injustice and exploitation feelings. Cancun is an unbalanced society not only regarding economy and services, but also in the way tragedies are distributed.

### **The pandemic “brought by the rich”**

It all began with the return of a group of powerful businessmen who went skiing in [Vail, Colorado](#), on a private trip, and returned to Mexico infected with COVID-19. At least that is how it was interpreted in different parts of the country. In Cancun in March, some workers claimed that they would not be affected by the new coronavirus, as they thought the disease would only hit the “rich” who travelled to Europe and the United States. In the beginning, it was believed that it was a “rich man's” disease and that they would not get it. This interpretation is linked with the ideas that were developed by the mass media about the pandemic. As elsewhere, the epidemic travelled from tourist sites to residence workers' places; from the homes of people with the economic capacity to travel to the homes of those who serve them.

The COVID-19 pandemic was arriving in Mexico on international flights. It arrived in a country where more than 50% of the population lives in poverty and where diseases related to poor nutrition are prevalent. Being obesity one of them as it is considered a chronic disease that accentuates and aggravates serious pathologies such as diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular diseases. According to the



Ministry of Health, in Mexico, seven out of ten adults, four out of ten adolescents and one out of three children are overweight or obese, which is considered a serious public health problem.

It is also estimated that [90 percent of cases of type 2 diabetes mellitus are caused by overweight and obesity](#). In Mexico, three out of 20 deaths are due to diabetes. It is estimated that from 2000 to 2016 more than 1.2 million deaths have occurred as a consequence of diabetes. This explains why, in April, 44.33% of those who died were people suffering from hypertension; 39.69% had diabetes and 37.63% were also obese.

Thus, on the 27th of February 2020 the first case of COVID-19 was reported in Mexico City and, with the above-mentioned background, on the 23rd of March the Federal Government started its “healthy distance” programme. Across the country, activities were interrupted, including the closure of schools and universities. In Quintana Roo 475,000 students at all educational levels suspended classes on this date. The day before, the State Secretary of Tourism released a statement on social media, reporting that there was a 36% hotel occupancy rate, where only over 80,000 people were logged in. Regarding employment, the State Governor emphasized that in the program “Together we will move forward” promoted by his government, he was seeking to reach an agreement with the production sector (that is how employers are named) to protect employment and workers during the crisis. He asked people to go home with the certainty that they would have a job and an income to go through this season.

## **COVID-19 in Cancun**

As mentioned before, everybody (hoteliers, workers, taxi drivers) was waiting for the arrival of the Easter holidays to make a profit, but instead of tourists, the pandemic came. Flights from Europe, the United States and Canada, the main touristic markets, were reduced to a minimum. On the 30th of March, the hotel occupancy rate dropped to 7%. According to the Cancun Hotel Association, this destination finished February with 86.1% occupation rate, but with the COVID-19 spread, tourist arrivals dropped to 7.1% in Cancun, and the situation was expected to get worse on the Riviera Maya.



At the end of March, the hotels were still operating, but there were already reported cases of infected people. The state of Quintana Roo, to which Cancun belongs, recorded a total of 42 positive cases of coronavirus on the 29th of March, one case in Tulum and one in Cozumel.

It was pointed out that the most affected sector in Quintana Roo was the travel and tourism industry, on which more than 85% of the state's economy depends. The impact was immediately seen because Cancun and the Riviera Maya are highly dependent on international tourism, being the United States, Canada and several points in Europe the main sources of tourists. Along with the flight cancellations and hotel closures, clubs, guided tours, and visits to archaeological sites were suspended.

The arrival of the pandemic led to a drastic fall in employment. The large hotel resorts decided to close down during the pandemic. Large chains such as Excellence, Grupo Riu, Hard Rock International and Grupo Xcaret, among others, decided to close temporarily in order to minimize losses. Out of all of them, only Grupo Xcaret made public its commitment to close and maintain the wages of its 13 thousand workers. This did not happen with the others.

It is estimated that in the Quintana Roo hotel sector alone, more than 200,000 direct jobs and more than 400,000 indirect jobs were affected by the closures. For this reason, the governor urged employers and trade unions to sign “a pact”, which was joined by 600 companies, in which they promised not to fire their workers in the middle of the health crisis. He asked entrepreneurs to be supportive, because “Quintana Roo has given a lot to them; it has given them profits and returns on investment.” It is estimated that in 2019 alone, the state of Quintana Roo generated more than 15 billion dollars out of the total 24.563 billion dollars that the whole country makes from tourism.

Clubs, guided tours or visits to archaeological sites were cancelled. Due to the collapse of visitors, large hotel resorts decided to close while the situation persisted, large chains such as Excellence, Grupo RIU, Hard Rock International or Grupo Xcaret decided to close temporarily in order to minimize losses. The crisis was anticipating a wave of worker layoffs. However, others continued to operate, especially with visitors from the United States, whose flights were reduced but not cancelled. They arrived at hotels that guaranteed meticulous care to ensure the health of their guests. One of them was the hotel that the [Vidanta group has in the Riviera Maya, where there is a comprehensive prevention plan](#).

## How to survive in the middle of the pandemic?

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the town of Benito Juárez, which is where the city of Cancun is located, was among the first national places with the highest number of cases and deaths from COVID-19, only behind Mexico City and the cities of Tijuana and Mexicali, bordering the United States and receiving a high number of migrants.

By the 10th of May, the date of this investigation's closure, 813 positive cases of COVID-19, 109 suspects and 143 deaths were reported in Benito Juárez. Its situation differs from the rest of the towns in Quintana Roo, as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1.

### Confirmed COVID-19 cases, suspects and deaths (as of 05/10/2020)

Municipality	Total population*	COVID-19 confirmed	COVID-19 suspects	COVID-19 deaths
Benito Juárez	743.626	813	109	143
Solidaridad	209.634	179	43	25
Isla Mujeres	19.495	10	0	0
Tulum	32.714	12	0	2
Felipe Carrillo Puerto	81.742	4	0	1
Othon P. Blanco	224.080	11	3	3
José María Morelos	37.502	3	0	1
Lázaro Cárdenas	27.243	5	0	1
Cozumel	86.415	22	1	7
Bacalar	39.111	---	---	---

(\*) Estimated population, INEGI, Intercensal Survey 2015.

Source: own elaboration based on [Reporte COVID-19](#), Gobierno de México, accessed May 11, 2019.

It is also significant that the town of Benito Juárez experienced almost the same number of positive cases of COVID-19 as in the whole nearby state of Yucatán. In terms of deaths, Benito Juárez has 3.1 times more than the entire state of Yucatan,

a state which has three times more population than Benito Juárez, as can be seen in table 2.

Hence, we cannot help but wonder about the importance of tourism in the population's greater vulnerability facing the pandemic, considering that Benito Juárez has very high mobility and global connection, as opposed to the state of Yucatan, which is not yet an essential tourist state, as if it is the state of Quintana Roo, and in particular, the town of Benito Juárez. These numbers could be explained by the fact that Benito Juárez is a touristic city, therefore it has greater mobility, both of tourists and migrant workers, and greater connection of both national and international flights.

Table 2.

**Confirmed COVID-19 cases, suspects and deaths. Comparison between the municipality of Benito Juárez in Quintana Roo and the State of Yucatan.**

Location	Total population*	COVID-19 confirmed	COVID-19 suspects	COVID-19 deaths
República Mexicana	119.938.473	35.022	19.979	3.465
Yucatán	2.097.175	829	110	47
Benito Juárez	743.626	813	109	143

(\*) The total population corresponds to the total population estimated by INEGI, Intercensal Survey 2015. Source: own elaboration based on [Reporte COVID-19](#), Gobierno de México, accessed May 11, 2019.

By the 30th of April, Quintana Roo reached its peak of confirmed cases (its acme) so, from that moment on, the possible return to commercial activities was announced for the 1st of June. To this purpose, it was estimated that the number of infected people would be stabilized and then start to decline, which could happen as long as the strict measures of the National Distance Health Day were maintained.

Among hoteliers, restaurateurs and other businessmen, a gradual return to economic activities was considered starting on the 1st of June. It was even considered selling the idea of promoting Covid-19 free hotels. The "Covid-fee" was proposed by the Hotel Association of Cancun, Puerto Morelos and Isla Mujeres, to have a badge issued by the State Secretary of Tourism and Health. But it cannot be that simple

because it largely depends on the re-establishment of the issuing markets: The United States and Canada, which together represent 43% of the market received by the Mexican Caribbean, so it aims to stimulate the national market.

In response to the crisis, the Federal Government urged employers to show greater solidarity, which means suspending non-essential activities and granting their workers permission to stay at home with their wages. Of course, in a country where more than 50% of workers are in casual positions and small households, they cannot be all forced to follow the same measures.

In Quintana Roo, since mid-March, when the pandemic began, Mario Machuca, president of the Revolutionary Confederation of Workers and Peasants (CROC), which represents almost all the workers in the hotel sector, estimated that at least 40% of the workers in that state would lose their jobs, which would mean the dismissal of about 80,000 employees. The first to suffer the consequences were construction workers, who were left unemployed and without any type of income when their activities were suspended. The state government provided buses to take these workers to their small rural home communities in the states of Yucatan, Veracruz and Tabasco. The increasing number of positive cases in these states may be due to these internal repatriation migrations.

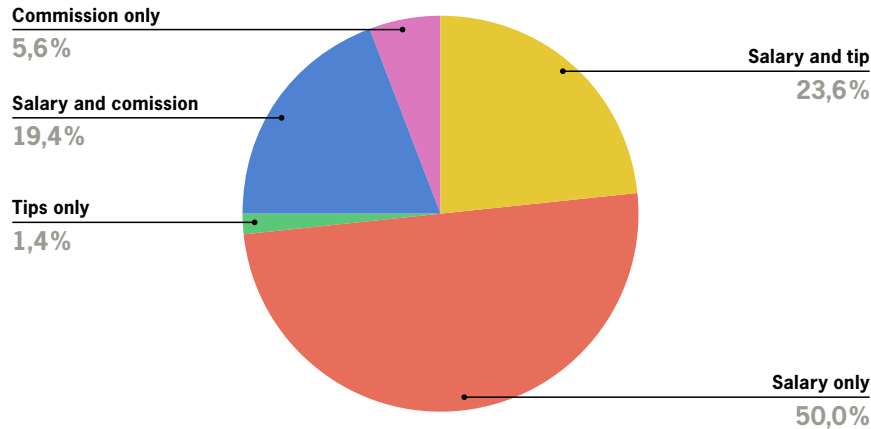
In Cancun, some employers decided to keep the wages of their workers during the quarantine. This is the case of the XCaret Group, which decided to continue paying their 13 thousand workers from March 23th to the 1st of June, the date on which they planned to return to their activities. But this is not the case for everyone. Another important Mexican hotel and tourist attraction group is Vidanta, which has a hotel and contracts with Cirque du Soleil on the Riviera Maya. The group was accused by the Federal Labour Secretary of dismissing their 20,000 workers, but they immediately denied it. In some cases, it was decided to pay only half of the salary and in others, not to pay them at all. Others asked workers to do the quarantine and support the company “in solidarity”, in other words, without a salary. All of this, in exchange for the promise of being rehired once the epidemic was over. However, according to data from the Mexican Social Security Institute (IMSS) from the 13th of March to the 6th of April, [Quintana Roo reported 63,847 job reductions](#).

Given the lack of information and in order to know the strategies followed by hotel, restaurant and other services workers, from the 26th of March to the 30th of April, an electronic questionnaire was created aiming to identify the main strategies

that the workers living in Cancun would follow in order to face the pandemic. The questionnaire consisted of 22 questions and was distributed through email, Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp. The questionnaire was taken by 72 workers, of which 44 (61.1%) were men and 28 (38.9%) women.

To the question: How are you paid or how were you paid for your work? 36 workers (51%) answered salary, 17 (23%) said they received salary and tips, 14 (19%) salary and commission, 4 (0.5%) commission only and one (0.1%) tips only (See graph 1)

Graphic 1.  
**How are you or were you compensated for your work?**



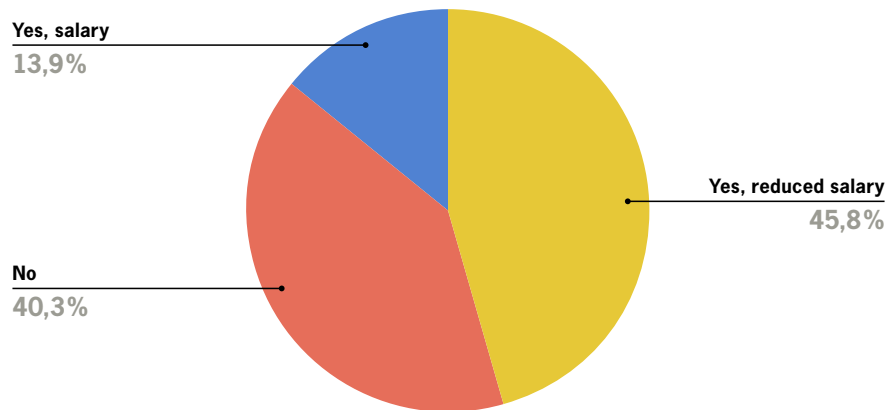
Source: own elaboration.

Of those who responded, 72.2% said they were allowed to miss work because of the situation and 27.8% were forced to continue working despite the state of emergency.

When they were asked if their salary was maintained during the emergency, 59.7% answered affirmatively, but only 13.9% received their full salary. The other 40.3% said that their employers did not sustain their salary. In addition, 76.4% said they had no other source of income (see Figure 2).

So, what we do?

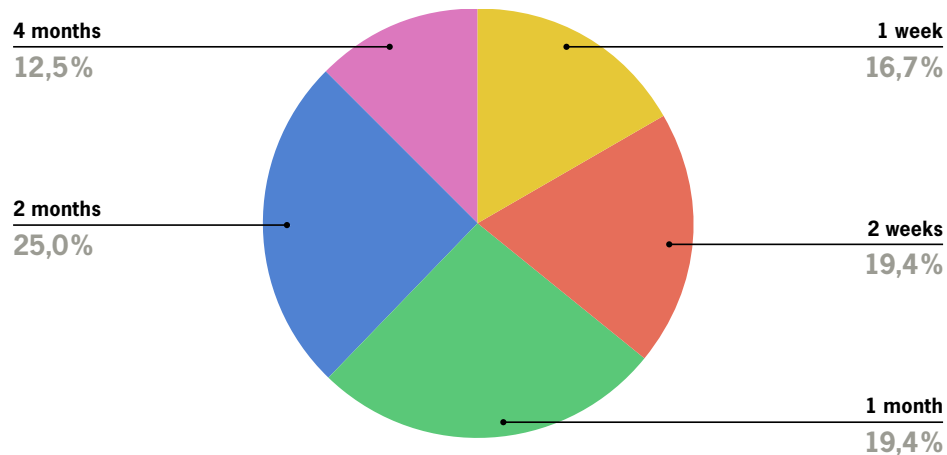
Graphic 2.  
**Do they support your salary even if you are absent due to contingency?**



Source: own elaboration.

They were later asked if they had savings to survive the pandemic: 68.1% said yes, compared to 31.9% who responded negatively. Of those with savings, only nine said they had enough to survive for four months; the rest could survive less than two months. Significantly, that 12 workers had savings for only one week, and 14 for two weeks (see graph 3).

Graphic 3.  
**Without an income, how long can you afford your savings?**



Source: own elaboration.

Given the precarious conditions, it is to be expected that workers will rely on other ways to survive in this pandemic. They were therefore asked who they would approach if they needed money urgently: 31.3% said they would approach their relatives, 27.0% their friends and 20.9% the bank. The remaining answers indicate that they would go to their employer (7%); to the government (7%), to their neighbours (5.2%) and to a lender (1.7%).

This shows how vulnerable the people who work in this tourist city are to an eventuality as dramatic as a pandemic. This is not the first time that they have been in such a situation in Cancun. In 2009, with the H1N1 virus emergency, thousands of workers were fired from their jobs, Cancun hotels were empty and international tourism ceased to arrive.

## Conclusions

The human invasion of occupied niches by other animal species confirmed epidemiologists' predictions of a future global crisis. This is not the first sanitary emergency of the 21st century, but it is the first one in which two billion people worldwide are simultaneously home confined. Today, global society is facing the challenge of COVID-19, a virus that not only constitutes a health problem but also disrupts daily life, the way people relate to each other, produce, communicate and govern, among many other things. Tourism is not an exception.

The sanitary emergency challenges the type of touristic development that promotes its growth by destroying the natural resources and the poverty of the population of the destination countries and regions.

Cancun is a city made for tourism and, as this is the main and perhaps only economic activity, it was completely vulnerable against the pandemic, as was also the case in the past with the H1N1 influenza virus, which also left thousands of workers unemployed in 2009. But even before that, Cancun had to pay for the effects of climate change. The arrival of Hurricane Wilma on the 22nd of October 2005 caused millions worth in material damage; it led to the loss of jobs and a strong environmental impact, as the beaches no longer had any sand and the mangrove area was affected by the wind. Four months after the event, the beach recovery project began (Martí, 2006). Cancun was renovated, hotels, streets, avenues were rebuilt, but even



some years later the “regions” and “superblocks” were still waiting for support to rebuild devastated houses and streets.

Although this touristic city has generated enormous wealth, the profits are not reflected in the improved welfare of its population, nor a substantial improvement in the working conditions and income of the workers. In this emergency, half of the surveyed people reported the lack of wages during the quarantine. It was said that people went there to take a “solidarity break”, that is, they were supporting the big multinational tourism chains. Among those who were paid, not everyone received a full salary. A significant proportion of the workers didn’t receive anything: the tippers, the commission agents and all those who pay for work had no income to get through the quarantine. Similarly, hundreds of domestic workers were dismissed or sent on unpaid leave, because everything was left to the goodwill of their employers due to the state’s failure to enforce the law to protect them.

This leads us to research the number of people infected and the number of deaths from coronavirus. Cancun is a world-class city that generates substantial income, therefore it was expected that the healthcare and hospital conditions would be better to deal with the pandemic, but this was not the case. It is striking that, with almost the same population, Cancun has had 143 deaths and Merida, capital of the nearby state of Yucatan, has recorded only 24 deaths from coronavirus, according to the data recorded on the 11th of May of 2020. In other words, Cancun had recorded almost six times more deaths than Merida, if the official data is correct. Why the difference? These questions remain open to be answered by a final question: what kind of tourism model is needed to reduce population’s vulnerability from touristic cities to future pandemics?

Today more than ever it is necessary to rethink the type of tourism development in the short term, considering that three events (a hurricane and two epidemics) occurred less than two decades. This means that another event of this type may happen very soon, considering also that climate change is underway and will continue to intensify if we do not change our methods of production and consumption. As part of this, no resources should be spared in order to achieve sustainable tourism with a social sense, respectful towards biodiversity: tourism with social responsibility.

The fact that a small city like Cancun has three times more deaths from COVID-19 than the entire state of Yucatan, leads us to consider the vulnerability of tourism workers and the need to promote socially responsible tourism. Cancun’s is not.

Viruses are an invisible threat, but not their effects: diseases and deaths are out there causing damage, generating fear, mistrust and a desire to protect ourselves. A virus represents an invisible threat. The spread of the virus creates environments for other underlying “epidemics” to germinate, including classism, racism, xenophobia, sexism and other phobias, where prejudice, stigmatization and/or segregation from “the other” can rapidly spread and seriously affect stigmatized societies. [This is what happened in Cancun during the 2009 pandemic](#). Now, just eleven years later, the experience has been repeated, but in this case, increased and magnified by the spread and aggressiveness of a highly contagious virus with no medicine or vaccine available to date. If no assessment is made regarding tourism enterprises that destroy natural resources, the vulnerability of tourists and host societies will be a constant issue in the coming years. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the table the type of development that needs to be followed. We cannot, therefore, go back to the normality that has caused the disaster.

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## TOUR GUIDES' GLOBAL STRUGGLE FOR EMERGENCY AID

Bianca Paes G. dos Santos<sup>26</sup>

While governments and large companies are concerned with suggesting perspectives and trends in the post-crisis world, interested in a market recovery, a part of the working class on a global scale is concerned with the present, with the pandemic's survival.

In this scenario, debates about minimum income (or basic income) surface worldwide. Although the proposal should be a universal and permanent program, it is an emergent and subsistence need for crisis periods. The UN World Food Program (WFP) estimates that another 130 million people are facing food shortages due to the pandemic. According to Miguel Barreto, regional director of the institution for Latin America and the Caribbean, there is "[the need to expand cash transfer programs, especially in regions with high rates of informal workers](#)". Besides, he states that the crisis will worsen in these countries, since, with these workers' paralysis, there will be no income to maintain their food consumption. This will lead to a food crisis as a result of the coronavirus crisis.

In Brazil, the informal worker rate was 40,6% until February and, during the pandemic, 12,8 million people were already unemployed. In addition, a study by the **Solidarity Research Network** indicates that [unemployment is higher than that announced by official figures, which ignore the hidden unemployment caused by social distancing](#). In this sense, the increase in unemployment in the country reached rates of 25,3% in May.

To minimise the pandemic's impacts for informal workers, individual microentrepreneurs (MEIs), the self-employed, and the unemployed, **emergency aid from the federal government** was created. However, the aid's granting has a series of exclusions, such as the maximum limit of taxable income in 2018, the limit of family income up to 3 minimum wages, etcetera. Besides, there are errors of analysis of the system, which is configured as a palliative and insufficient policy to satisfy society's

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needs. The value of this aid (R \$ 600.00, about 94 euros) is scarce for many families' sustenance since it is below the average monthly salary of most of the assisted workers. So, according to **Ana Carolina Rodrigues**, professor at the Faculty of Economic, Business and Accounting Sciences of the University of Sao Paulo (FEA/USP), "[what happens is that these people need to choose between staying at home and protecting themselves or going to work to survive](#)".

In the group of economic activities, tourism stands out for a high rate of informality, concretely 52% (IPEA, 2017). Furthermore, work in tourism is characterised by other precariousness manifestations, such as long hours, low wages, flexible hours, and anti-union actions. Moreover, tour guides are among the groups in a more fragile position in tourism labour, mainly because only 5% of professionals have employment ties (RAIS, 2018). Therefore, the other guides are self-employed or have the registration as MEI. In both cases, the remuneration is for work performed; that is, they only perceive payment if they effectively provide a service. Following the paralysis of tourism in the period of the pandemic, they have no source of income.

Despite this, many of them were unable to access assistance from the federal government. The **Commission of Guides of the State of São Paulo** developed a survey in April to better support the justification of its bill and, in it, it identified that only 40% of the tourist guides of this State received the aid. The **São-Roquense Tourist Guides Association** reproduced the survey and identified that, among its members, only 35% received the aforementioned help.

Faced with the apparent need for assistance and the insufficient aid provided, this part of the working class in tourism began to organise to guarantee their rights, not only in Brazil.

## A global demand

It is common for the mainstream media to propagate the discourse of "reinvention" and "entrepreneurship" in crisis times, strengthening neoliberal narratives. Many workers emigrate from the activity in these periods, not voluntarily, but by lack of choice and assistance, as the only alternative for their families' livelihood and survival.

**Thao Nguyen** explains to VNExpress International that Vietnam's tour guides have lost their jobs since the country blocked foreigners' entry in March. These

workers now [struggle with the imperative to do something else and are finding temporary jobs in different areas](#) due to the lack of government assistance.

According to **Shakeel Chauhan**, vice president of the **Federation of Indian Tour Guides**, 3.500 guides in the country have already lost their source of income due to the pandemic crisis. They are demanding an aid package from the local government, justifying it on the grounds that other countries, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Indonesia, Singapore and Thailand have already guaranteed emergency aid to these workers. **Shamsuddin Khan**, president of the Association of Tourist Guides (ATGA), considers that the instability in the sector will continue for about a year, and affirms that, to practice the profession regularly, workers must commit not to carry out any other paid activity, so they are left with no income.

“Like other unorganised sectors, we have also urged the government to help us with a financial package during crises for the survival of our families, since we do not have a regular income, nor job security, nor a pension nor a medical centre”, [Khan said](#). He added that its survival depends entirely on the arrival of tourists from around the world. “But due to the pandemic, everything has been closed, and nobody knows how long they will remain unemployed”.

In Thailand, at least 30.000 tour guides have become unemployed as the flow of tourists has decreased. According to **Jarupol Rueangket**, chairman of the **Thailand Tourism Council**, most of these workers have no other jobs or financial savings, so he [suggested to the Council that proposals be drawn up to send the low-interest loan application to the government](#). Months earlier, the **Thai Tour Guides Association** [wrote a letter to the Minister of Tourism and Sports requesting emergency relief measures](#).

The alternative of granting loans for this professional category has not been unique to Thailand. [In Turkey, the Government also provided this type of assistance](#), which does not seem an appropriate route for this group, since there are no prospects of resuming tourist activities. In turn, the reopening of tourism does not guarantee the immediate reintegration of guides in the labour market. Even after the state of alarm in Spain, tourists' circulation has been low, especially of those who tend to hire tour guides. The practical absence of groups organised by agencies adds that there is very little individual demand. “[It is unusual for people from the same province to hire us, it is much more common for those who live from other regions or](#)

[countries to do so, which are very few at the moment](#)”, says **Tomás Vivas**, president of the **Extremadura Association of Tourist Guides** (AGUITEX).

The reopening of tourism in Paris was marked by protests by tour guides in front of the **Louvre Museum**. Workers gathered holding portraits of the Mona Lisa and asking for government support to overcome the crisis since in May France announced measures to support the tourism sector. However, according to **Margot Schmitz**, one of the protesters, [such aid never reached tour guides](#).

On the other side of the Atlantic, in Brazilian lands, situations similar to the examples cited above occurred. There were media reports that “romanticised” the precarious situation of tour guides without jobs or income amid the pandemic who had to emigrate or improvise new economic activities (such as this one from the newspaper [O Globo](#) and this one from [Nossa](#)). In reality, [there were measures to support the tourism sector that did not reach the guides](#), in addition to an [increase in the supply of loans](#), [various protests](#), and [demonstrations](#).

## The struggle of Brazilian guides

*“The picture is even less rosy in countries that have not provided any financial assistance to guides facing the pandemic”*

**Alushca Ritchie**, president of the **World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations** ([Skift](#), 05/06/2020)

The fight of the Brazilian tour guides for emergency aid accompanies the world claims. However, given the national representative entity’s limited commitment, the class mobilisations were organised at each state’s level. In some, the movement’s leadership comes from associations, in others from commissions or even, in a smaller number, from unions.

These organised groups of workers sought each of their states’ deputies to draft bills that would authorise the Executive Power to use resources to mitigate the pandemic’s effects for tourist guides in that territory. It is important to note that, as it is a costly bill for the State, it cannot oblige the Executive Power to commit to this “expense” and, therefore, limits itself to authorising the use of resources by the legislative branch. In summary, the project provides a basic emergency income for tour guides during the pandemic period in amounts that refer to a minimum wage



or a state minimum wage. Among the main justifications presented by the proposed legislation, the following are highlighted: (1) the tourism sector was the first to stop its activities, (2) most of the guides are self-employed and are not assisted by labour rights, (3) tourism depends on the location for your experience, which restricts adjustments to the line and prevents the guide from being active during isolation, and (4) tourism will possibly be one of the last economic activities to recover, as travel and leisure activities can be seen as superfluous services and will therefore only be consumed again after a considerable stabilisation of the rest of the economy.

**Rio de Janeiro's** tour guides were the first to join the state plan, with the application for basic emergency income in April. After several procedures, the guides were integrated into a bill draft together with other professional categories that requested the same claim. Next were the guides **from São Paulo**, followed by those from **Paraná** and other states. Faced with such mobilisations, other actions arose, such as: (1) bill drafts with the same purpose at the municipal level, as in the case of Foz do Iguaçu / PR, Maceió / AL and Rio de Janeiro / RJ; (2) projects to collect basic food baskets, such as in Campinas / SP, Aracaju / SE, Ilhéus / BA, Fortaleza / CE, São Luís / MA, among others; and (3) an emergency citizen entry card for purchases at the market and at the pharmacy for the Amapá tourist guides.

In total, the Brazilian guides have articulated 11 proposed legislation initiatives (state and municipal) that demand basic income for this group. Among all of them, only that of the state of Rio de Janeiro has already been approved and sanctioned, despite not ensuring that the workers have received those resources. Now the fight consists of regulating by law for its practical application. In Santa Catarina, for example, the project had a reduced value, equivalent to federal aid, to which the same restrictions were also added. In São Paulo, they are still fighting for an urgent procedure in the Legislative Assembly (ALESP), which may guarantee the acceleration of the processes.

In Foz do Iguaçu / PR, the Mayor's Office negotiates a "counterproposal" to the bill draft presented by the Association of Guides. Instead of providing a basic income to workers, the Executive Power suggests hiring tour guides for excursions with residents, in a program to resume tourism in Foz do Iguaçu. The project has not yet been approved, but it suggests several debates. Obviously, for guides who have been out of work for almost five months, the possibility of earning income by providing services to the City Council is an alternative for supporting their families.



However, the risk to which workers are exposed during the pandemic is undeniable in tourism's early resumption.

What do all these projects have in common? **What is the struggle of tour guides around the world?** The search by these workers for minimum conditions to survive in the face of a pandemic. There is no way to discuss any post-pandemic scenario without first ensuring workers' survival during the pandemic. We are still immersed in it, and it would be an illusion to imagine that the resumption will take place in the short term.

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## COVID-19 CRISIS IN COSTA RICA: AN INCREASINGLY COMPLEX SCENARIO

Arturo Silva Lucas<sup>27</sup>

In Costa Rica, the health and economic crisis caused by COVID-19 continues. While in the first three months the country had a relative success in containing the virus since the declaration of national emergency on March 16th, now the scenario is different. The second wave of infections dramatically increased the number of positive cases at a time when the economic depression reached more vulnerable sectors. If by May the positive cases did not reach eight hundred in mid-July, they exceed eight thousand. Specifically, as of July 16, 8.986 confirmed cases and 40 deaths are reported according to the [John Hopkins Resource Centre](#).

The national discussion is polarized around the will to continue with the restrictive regulations in transport and commerce or, on the contrary, to advance more expeditiously in the reopening phases. These latest demands come mainly from chambers and business associations that, in addition, extend their requests for a general reform of the State. Their proposals deal with different dimensions of economic activity as well as all productive sectors, including tourism.

### What is going on in Costa Rica?

The institutional management of the pandemic includes [four phases](#) distributed between the months of May thru August. Each phase has increasingly flexible measures concerning the opening of commerce, vehicle restrictions, maximum capacity in enclosures and access to public spaces such as parks and protected wilderness areas. The step to each phase depends on the increase in the positive case count.

Due to the relative success in the first three months, the transition from phase one to phase two was according to the dates set by the Ministry of Health (MINSA). By June 21, it was expected to enter phase three, however, the dramatic increase in positive cases in June made any intention of a general opening impossible. In the

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month of June alone, 2,370 new cases were registered according to the count of the John Hopkins Resource Centre.

The increase in positive cases is extensive throughout the country, with special prominence in the cantons and districts of the central valley. However, the evolution of the contagion map shows a marked trend towards the border provinces of the northwest of the country. [Guanacaste and the north of the province of Alajuela appear as red alert zones due to the sudden increase in the registration of positive cases in the month of June.](#)

As a result of greater flexibility in phase two, massive outbreaks of contagion occurred in the central cantons. Due to a higher population density, and therefore a greater exposure to risk, the [southern neighbourhoods](#) of the capital San José have experienced an increase outside of MINSA's projections.

At the same time, the northern cantons of San Carlos, Los Chiles and Upala in the province of Alajuela have had a significant rebound. In large part, the precarious conditions of the workforce that nurtures the local agribusiness have revealed a high vulnerability to contagion. [On June 24, the MINSA ordered the closure of 23 pineapple and packing companies for sanitary breaches.](#) The actions are part of field tours carried out by the second vice president Epsy Campbell to 249 companies in the area. It has been shown a [high number of workers without social security, sub-contracting outside of wage legislation, non-compliance with overtime pay, hiring of foreigners in irregular conditions and physical plants without minimum sanitary conditions.](#) This situation has always been an open secret in Costa Rica. The job insecurity together with the environmental degradation in which migrants and working families of pineapple coexist has been criticized by environmental, community and academic groups. The pandemic crisis has only made this situation visible.

On the economic level, expectations are not encouraging either. According to the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (INEC) **in the months of February, March and April, an increase of 4.4% in unemployment** was registered in relation to the same months of the previous year. These data reflect only the first month and a half from the start of the pandemic. A significant increase in these figures are expected in the second quarter of the year (INEC, 2020). For the end of 2020, the Central Bank of Costa Rica (BCCR) **estimates a drop of 3.6% of GDP**, mainly in

relation to the demand for construction (-8.7%), hotels and restaurants (-27, 6%) in relation to the previous year <sup>28</sup>.

The Institute of Research in Economic Sciences of the University of Costa Rica (UCR) presents a slightly less encouraging scenario. He states that the **economic contraction will be between 4% and 6%, and the sector most affected will be tourism**. In projection to the second semester of the year, it estimates that the fall in tourism will contribute to the contraction 1.5% of the estimated total <sup>29</sup>.

## Tourism in search of solutions

The tourism sector has been greatly affected by the crisis caused by COVID-19. The initial measures taken by MINSA meant a forced stop in the entire network of services and linkages that characterize the sector. The absolute closure of airports and the temporary closure of lodgings led to the declaration, for the first time in the country's tourist history, of **Season 0**, that is, no income for the sector.

In a [previous article](#), published on May 2, it was detailed the first actions taken by the government and the initial reactions of the tourism sector. Among the first measures that the Executive took in this area are: compensating with a subsidy to people who have seen their income diminished due to the pandemic; suspension in court orders for essential services; and postponement of the payment of utility and value added taxes. For its part, the Costa Rican Tourism Institute (ICT) suspended the payment of specific taxes and designed a phased plan to reactivate tourism activity.

Among the first reactions described in that article was the rejection of coastal populations to the arrival of tourists during Easter. Through blockades on the beaches of the central Pacific and South Caribbean, the receiving communities intended to stop the spread of the virus in their communities. Today the scenario is opposite. [On June 24, simultaneous marches were held in the eight main tourist beaches in the country](#): Coco and Tamarindo beaches in Guanacaste, Manuel Antonio and Jacó beaches in the central Pacific, Pavones and Santa Teresa in the South Pacific and Puerto Viejo in the Caribbean South. Even though from phase two the lodging ser-

28 Costa Rica facing the pandemic: macroeconomic situation and 2020-21 projections. Presentation on April 24, 2020. Rodrigo Cubero Breal, president of the Central Bank of Costa Rica.

29 Estimation of the effects of COVID-19 on the Costa Rican economy. Institute of Research in Economic Sciences, University of Costa Rica. May, 2020. Public presentation.

vices can receive 50% of their capacity and the beaches have opening hours from 5:00 am to 9:30 am, the protesters demand the full opening of the coasts. The marches were made up of micro and small entrepreneurs, employees of tourist services, residents, and local surfing associations. They consider that if the main tourist product is closed for most of the day, there is no attraction for tourists to visit the coasts.

Among the statements of the protesters collected by the press, expressions such as: [“I have respect for COVID-19 ... I am panicked for hunger.”](#) Others, inspired by the mobilizations against racism in the United States, said: “Beach Lives Matter.” And in a direct claim to institutional restrictions, they affirmed “The Ministry of Health condemns us to bankruptcy” or “Long live freedom.” [The most dramatic episode occurred in Tamarindo beach with the arrest of a protester](#) for violating social distancing measures, according to official sources. These demands are well received by organizations and chambers linked to tourist services such as hotels, carriers, and restaurants. At the same time, they are collected by the National Chamber of Tourism (CANATUR) which sends them to the ICT.

But the pressure to give oxygen to the tourism industry is not only about making sanitary measures more flexible, but also by demanding for immediate results. **In the short term, the ICT works on three lines of action: seeking financial sustainability for tourist SMEs, attracting foreign tourists, and promoting national tourism.** [In relation to the first,](#) ICT has been directly negotiating with various financial entities the payment of debts and access to differentiated credits for tourism ventures. It also working on the application of training and sanitary protocols to hotel personnel, restaurants, tourist transport, aquatic activities, and tourist guides.

Regarding the second line of action, ICT, contrary to the Executive’s intention to transfer all institutional surpluses to a single fund to address the pandemic, has invested [\\$ 18 million in positioning Costa Rica worldwide](#). The goal is to promote the country as the first destination to visit in the second half of the year, as the rest of the countries relax their immigration policies. The ICT, in coordination with the General Directorate of Migration and the Executive, [agreed to open international airports on August 1 under strict entry rules](#). The announcement about which nationalities may enter will be given days before the formal opening. However, it has already been explained that they will be from the [European Union, the United Kingdom and Canada depending on the evolution of the contagion in that country](#). Unofficially, it was revealed that the President of the Republic is in [conversations with the Austrian](#)

[Foreign Minister](#) to be part of a “tourist bubble” called “First Movers”. The goal is to reach unprecedented markets such as the Oceanic, the Middle East, the Nordic countries, and Eastern Europe. The initiative is motivated by the poor management of the health crisis in the United States, main source of foreign tourists in Costa Rica.

As for national tourism, ICT is working to constantly update the [“Vamos a Turistear”](#) website, the gateway to disseminating offers aimed at Costa Rican tourists. With the slogan “Conoce tu país” or “Know your country”, destinations and activities that can be done on short trips are promoted. The marketing strategy used is to show the Costa Rican cultural, gastronomic, and natural diversity through a correlate of closeness and familiarity.

CANATUR, for its part, has endorsed the demand in the Legislative Assembly to [transfer national holidays to the following Monday from this year and 2021](#). Processed under file 21,941, the proposed law reform aims to extend weekends to three days. In this way, Costa Ricans would have an incentive to take advantage of tourist offers in national destinations. Rejected in the first of the two debates, opposing deputies argue that the double payment obligation on national holidays should first be suspended.

### **The business sector proposal**

On June 5, the Costa Rican Union of Chambers and Associations of the Private Business Sector (UCCAEP), the main representative body of the large Costa Rican business community, gave the President of the Republic the Employment”. The text includes 113 actions that the UCAEEP considers vital to reactivate the economy within two years. The document is signed by 48 associations, chambers, and federations from nine economic sectors: agriculture, trade, foreign trade, construction, financial, industrial, technology and innovation, transport, and tourism. The representation of the tourism sector was made up of CANATUR, the Costa Rican Chamber of Health (PROMED), the Costa Rican Chamber of Hotels (CCH) and the Costa Rican Chamber of Restaurants and Related (CACORE).

The main goal of the proposal is to create a “climate of confidence” in the business sector that increases investment and employment to reactivate the economy. The text is organized in two chapters, the first brings together 12 cross-cutting topics

that the UCCAEP and all its affiliates consider key to revive the economy. In the second chapter, each sector points out specific and immediate requests that depend on what is proposed in the first chapter.

The 12 cross-cutting topics included in the document are:

- Building trust
- Credit offer
- Procedures Management
- Institutional efficiency
- Reduce Informality
- Fiscal deficit, Education
- Establish crisis management centre
- Public employment law
- Public-Private Partnerships
- Citizen Security, Port Situation.

Actually, the 12 cross-cutting topics synthesize the structural reforms that the UCCAEP has demanded in recent history and can be summarized in: **reduction of fiscal and social burdens; closing public institutions and cutting state personnel; participation in the drafting of public policy together with the promotion of public-private alliances; make labour and environmental legislation more flexible; and repression of common crime and smuggling.**

The first thing that stands out about the document is that it is written as a list of requests. It lacks justification or even an explanation of why those measures are urgent. The interpretation that emerges from the document is that businessmen consider themselves victims of the public apparatus. Made explicit when demands “to stop tax harassment and threatening messages to the private sector” (pg. 9).

In the labour topic, the document proposes to combat unemployment and informality with measures that undermine current labour legislation. Among the most relevant “Updating the working hours’ law to allow exceptions according to the needs of the parties, allowing the part-time contract” (pg. 15) and “adapting the public employment law to encourage efficiency and discipline in the public official” (pg. 18). Although the latter does not give further details on which points of the General Law of Public Employment must be amended. UCCAEP demands that there is no



progress with initiatives that would strengthen the work of the Ministry of Labour: “stop the legislative siege with the law to strengthen labour inspection” (pg. 10).

Also, UCCAEP asks to restructure public education according to the productive sector. They consider that the State must guarantee more resources to preschool and school education (pg. 17), to subsequently align professional and technical training with market needs.

Likewise, a general adaptation to current environmental regulations is proposed. They explicitly request “to eradicate the environmental siege” (pg. 23), since they consider that the current environmental provisions make an adequate “business climate” impossible.

The promotion of public-private alliances is the axis that articulates the set of ideas of UCCAEP, that reaches tourism activity. Along with greater labour flexibility and a reduction in environmental legislation, public-private partnerships would be “a mechanism to execute more constructions...” (pg. 19). These alliances are considered fundamental in the “development of regulatory plans, especially in the cantons where the 32 Tourist Development Centers are located” (pg. 41). With special mention to the “titling of properties registered in favour of the State in Tortuguero and the South Caribbean” (pg. 41) <sup>30</sup>. At the same time, a reduction in paperwork is appealed to obtain construction permits (pg. 12).

## What is Coming?

It is difficult to predict what the post pandemic scenario will be in Costa Rica. June was a turbulent month. The number of positive cases continues to rise; the first two weeks of July have broken records. The threat of expansion of community contagion looms. Despite the adverse reactions in the coastal communities, the health minister remains firm in the decision to keep the beaches closed.

Meanwhile, the pressure to adopt measures that facilitate commerce and economic activity is increasingly stronger. The actions of the ICT are aimed at a gradual return to the renormalize the tourism activity. Pressure groups demand extraordinary measures that transcend the current situation. The social and political climate

30 The South Caribbean stands out on the tourist map as the destination with has the most protected territory per square kilometer. [Previously it had been described](#) as through a bill, the reduction of the protected space was intended in favor of a private use of the space.

So, what we do?

in Costa Rica is polarized. The route of attention to the pandemic crisis is still open to sudden changes, the second semester of the year will be decisive, and we will see what orientations predominate.

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## **POLICIES TO REACTIVATE TOURISM IN CENTRAL AMERICA: WILL THE OLD MODEL RETURN?**

Angélica Duarte<sup>31</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic challenged the model of tourism that was being developed in Central America since the early '90s. An industry in constant growth that today faces its worst crisis in history. The loss of thousands of jobs, the closure of companies and borders, in other words, the uncertainty, have brought to public debate how tourism activity is understood. Today we talk about reactivation and recovery, but will the old model return, given these uncertain scenarios?

### **Health and economic outlook in the region**

2020 will be, with no doubt, remembered as one of the most complex and catastrophic years of the 21st century. The COVID19 pandemic has killed more than 770,000 people worldwide (as of mid-August), with historic unemployment rates and an unprecedented global economic crisis. On the other hand, the consequences of this pandemic have not been equally experienced around the world, as inequality is still prevalent and is threatening to deepen even more in the coming times.

The Central American region is one of those world regions where economic vulnerability encounters a fragile political-institutional framework. The picture for businesses, workers and economic activities in general is uncertain and discouraging. The COVID-19's impact will cause the region to experience a significant decline at least for the next two years, high unemployment rates and economic recovery policies that are still unpredictable and fairly scattered.

Tourism is one of the activities that has been most affected in recent months with the closure of borders, airports and other restrictions that have meant the total absence of tourists. In Central America, tourism has become one of the main sources of foreign exchange, employment generation and foreign investment. The importance of this activity in relation to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has also

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been important and has been in constant growth. However, COVID19 seems to have challenged this model of tourism.

In the Central American region, the situation is uncertain, as health restrictions continue in most countries. So far, the COVID19 infection curve continues to rise in most countries. According to compiled data by the **Coordination Centre for the Prevention of Disasters in Central America and the Dominican Republic** (CEPREDENAC) and provided by the health authorities of each country, the region had a cumulative total of 322,737 positive cases and 7,939 deaths on the 13th of August.

At the most recent extraordinary virtual meeting of Heads of State of the Central American Integration System (SICA) held on 12 March, several contingency measures against the coronavirus were proposed in an attempt to harmonize health policies against the virus. From this meeting a [Regional Contingency Plan](#) was published which remains in place to date and which includes the following measures:

- Joint negotiation for the purchase of medicines and medical supplies.
- Central American humanitarian corridor.
- Funding of more than US\$1.9 billion with the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI).
- Purchase of more than 180,000 COVID-19 tests for SICA member countries
- Regional Humanitarian Assistance Mechanism.
- Regional Economic Impact Study.
- Generation of a System of Regional Economic Indicators.

These measures must certainly be contrasted with each country's context since the management of these measures at the domestic level has been very different. In **Nicaragua's** case, for example, real-time data about the health situation have been quite questioned, even by the [World Health Organization authorities](#). Also, in recent days the Nicaraguan government announced that the Ministry of Health would be providing COVID-19 tests to people who need to travel outside the country [for \\$150](#). Similarly, all those seeking to enter the country will be required to provide a negative COVID-19 certificate to authorize their entry.

On the other hand, these new measures have recently generated a humanitarian crisis on some of Nicaragua's borders, as hundreds of Nicaraguans have decided to

return home, pushed by the loss of jobs and the difficult situation they are facing, especially in Costa Rica. About 600 people were prevented from entering Nicaragua's southern border for weeks because they did not have a COVID-19 negative test.

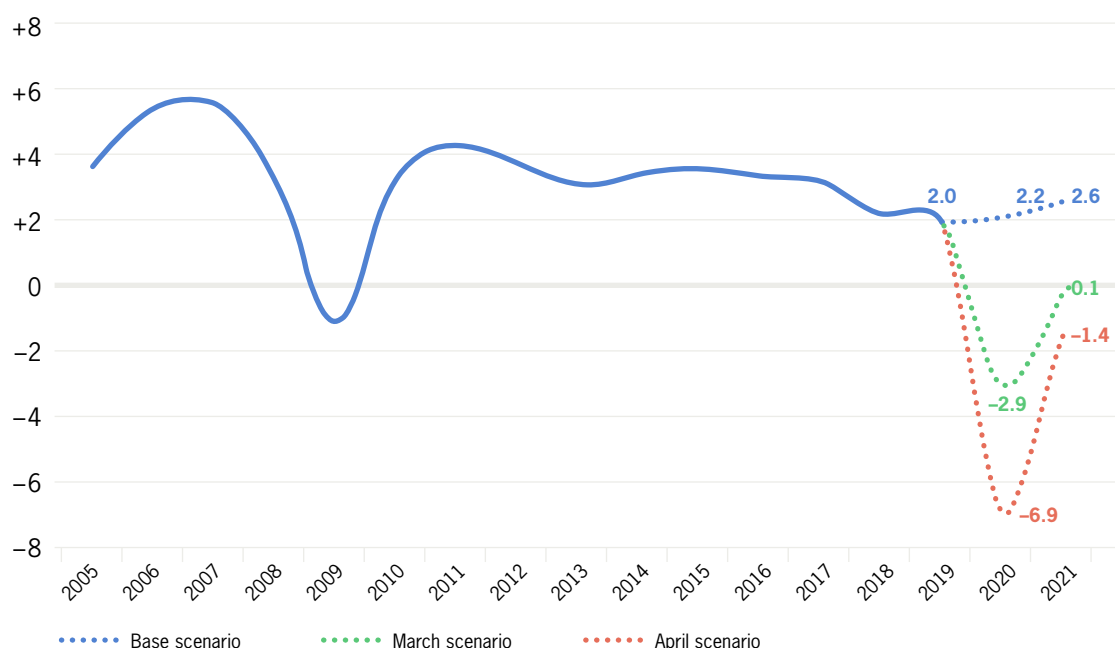
In May, [a regional trade crisis also arose due to Costa Rica's refusal to allow Central American cargo carriers to enter the country](#), testing positive for COVID19. This unilateral measure led to the closure of borders with Nicaragua and affected intraregional trade for weeks. Finally, through negotiations in the SICA's Advisory Committee on Economic Integration, this situation was resolved and commercial land travel resumed. These situations show that in reality, each country has decided to put its political and economic interests first, above regional coordination strategies.

Meanwhile, the economic outlook for the Central American region is not promising either. On the 30th of April, the **Central American Economic Integration Secretary** (SIECA) published the report [Estimation of the Economic Impact of COVID19 in Central America and the Dominican Republic](#). The document provides a future-oriented analysis of the main economic indicators in the region, taking into account the contingency measures regarding the coronavirus that have paralyzed exports, tourism, consumption and mobility, among other fundamental elements of a country's economy.

One of the main indicators is the decrease in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which in the case of Central America this report estimated to be -2.9% by March and -6.9% by April. In this sense, the impact of the economic decrease is also reflected in the significant reduction of the remittances for some countries in the region. This is an important indicator considering that remittances represent the main source of income for millions of households and one of the main sources of foreign exchange for states.

Figure 1.

### Projected economic growth for the SICA region Annual change in GDP (%) 2020-2021

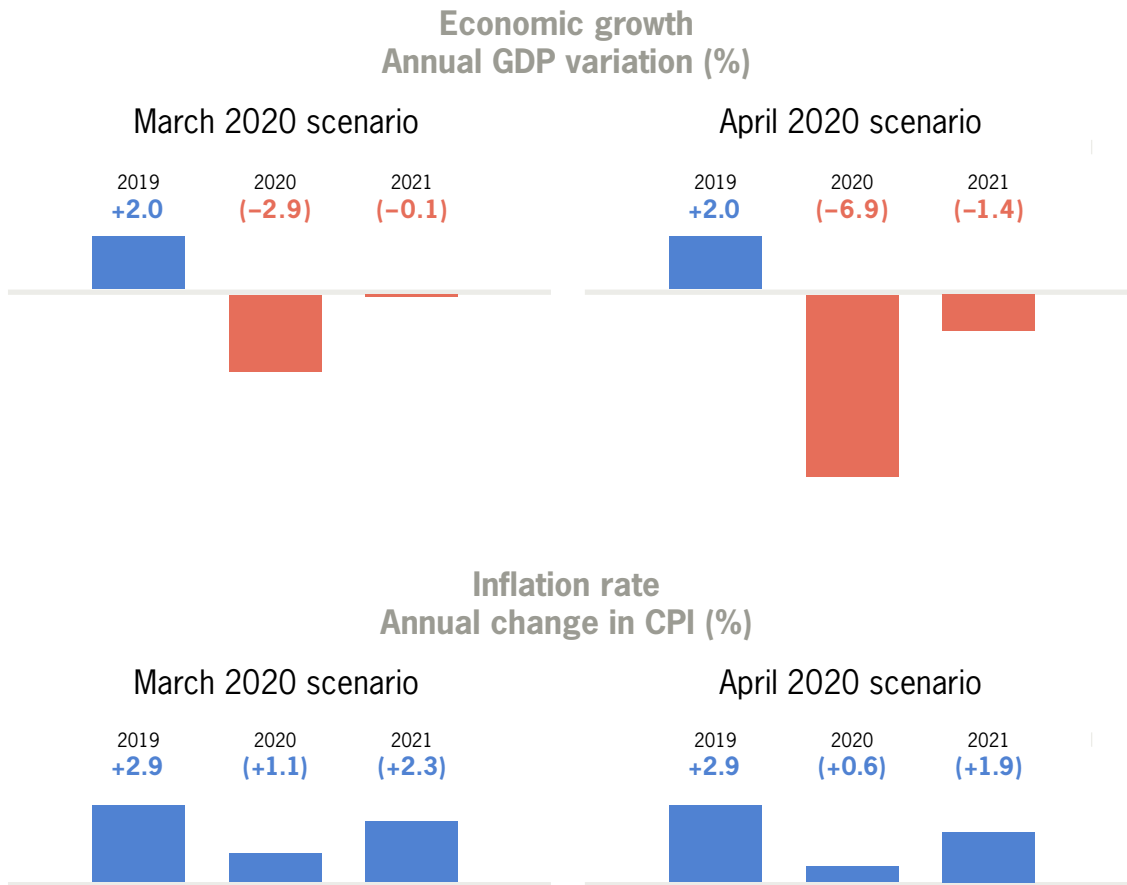


Source: [estimation of COVID19 Economic Impact in Central America and the Dominican Republic](#)

The **Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)** issued a [COVID-19 Special Report](#), updating the economic expectations for the region. Its findings stated that: “The demand for tourism services has been reduced in all the sub-regions of Latin America and the Caribbean. If comparing the first quarter of 2020 with the same period in 2019, international tourist arrivals decreased by 35% in South America, 39% in the Caribbean and 35% in Central America”. On the other hand, “the greatest impact occurs in services such as tourism, aviation, accommodation, restaurants, entertainment and commerce, excepts for supermarkets, pharmacies and other services considered essential by the concerned country”.

Therefore, the updated ECLAC projections for Latin America in terms of declining GDP are even more discouraging. Based on “The impact of ongoing processes is estimated by ECLAC to decline by an average of 9.1% in 2020 for the region as a whole, with decreases of 9.4% in South America, 8.4% in Central America and Mexico, and 7.9% in the Caribbean.”

Figure 2.  
**Summary of endogenous variables projections for the forecast model in Central America**



Source: [Estimation of COVID19 Economic Impact in Central America and the Dominican Republic](#)

Given this scenario, **SICA** has recently been actively involved in developing regional strategies aimed at boosting tourism and the regional economy in general, but these are only projections since most countries are still in quarantine and with restrictive measures.

**Policies to reactive tourism in Central America**

As we have seen, the dramatic fall in Central American tourism has caused historical losses in foreign exchange and jobs for all States. However, the nature of this new



Coronavirus has also presented unprecedented challenges in an industry that relies on travel and human interaction. Therefore, when thinking about the reactivation of tourism, inevitably discussions also emerge about the new measures that should regulate this activity, for a short term recovery.

In this context, at the [last meeting of the Central American Council of Tourism](#) (CCT) Nicaragua assumed the pro tempore presidency of this organization, as well as the one from **Central American Tourism Promotion Agency** (CATA). This meeting analysed the current situation of the industry and the recovery policies that are being considered for a post-pandemic scenario. These measures are also coordinated with the **Central American Secretary for Tourism Integration** (SITCA).

The proposed measures already being considered by these regional bodies are related to the creation of a quality and sustainable tourism certification. This would seek to position Central America as a safe region or “CovidFree”, which allows tourists to travel safely. To comply with these measures, companies will have to invest in biosafety protocols if they want in order to be eligible for this regional certification.

On the other hand, it is also stated that the Central American region is the second most important market in the region, so the commitment to **proximity tourism**, particularly in regional terms, would be one of the short-term goals. The business associations and tourism ministries of the different countries have positioned themselves against these approaches. Although a consensus seems to have emerged around some of the measures, the impact of the pandemic has had different intensity in each country, so the adaptability rate of these new tourism policies remains to be determined.

### What is the position of the Central American business chambers?

In **Nicaragua**, the recovery prospects for the tourism sector are more discouraging than in the rest of the region. Since 2018 with the socio-political crisis, the country has been suffering from a deep recession that has reduced the arrival of foreign tourists and therefore foreign exchange earnings. The Coronavirus pandemic only exacerbates the fragile situation in which this industry is placed.

A few months ago, the **National Chamber of Tourism of Nicaragua** (CANATUR) [launched a statement proposing to the government](#) several measures to mitigate the complicated situation faced by the country’s tourism companies. Some

of the measures they proposed included lowering amounts and suspending social security contributions for six months, accepting the temporary suspension of contracts, modifying working hours, cancelling electricity payments for five months, and stopping income tax payments, among others. The government's response was never received so neither of these measures was effectively implemented.

Regarding the tourism policies reactivation, one of the main concerns of the tourism chambers in Nicaragua has to do with the protocols announced by the government at the reopening of the Managua airport. The government's demands on airlines involve companies receiving negative COVID19 tests from passengers 72 hours in advance. This requirement also applies to crew members, who must also present a negative test for Coronavirus within this period, even if they are only transiting the country.

According to **Lucy Valenti**, president of CANATUR, [these demands, both to commercial airlines and charter flights, could be a strong reason why the airlines have not yet decided to resume their flights to and from Nicaragua](#). In this context, she stated: "It's not that they don't want to comply, it's that they are unable to meet these requirements and if they don't make them more flexible, they don't talk to or reach a consensus with their regional counterparts, it's going to be very difficult for the airlines to start operations in Nicaragua".

The **Government of Nicaragua**, through the **Nicaraguan Institute of Tourism** (INTUR), presented some initiatives aiming to reactivate tourism in the country. According to **Anasha Campbell**, co-director of INTUR, [there will be a commitment to national tourism in the short term](#) "In other words, the tourism that the same Nicaraguans do as we travel to the different destinations and tourist attractions of our country. That will be all in 2020 and the first half of 2021," she announced. So, in the mid-term, "we will be focused on regional tourism, which is the Central American region, as it has always been our main market. Between 67 and 70% of the tourists who come to Nicaragua are from the Central American region". Therefore, the idea is that this will become a reality in the second half of 2021 and throughout the year 2022.

In the long term, i.e. during the years 2023 to 2025, international tourism is expected to recover, but with certain aspects that are already being analysed by INTUR: "What all tourism experts do discuss on an international level, and what we have also seen, is that when the tourist industry is reactivated, the tendency is for

people to fly shorter distances to closer destinations. First within your own country and then what is much closer to you, what they call local flights or local tourism,” according to the Institute’s co-director.

In the case of **Costa Rica**, the business association has met with the government to coordinate measures to reactivate the sector. As part of this “new normality”, the **National Chamber of Tourism** (CANATUR), representing the strongest business sector, asked the government to allow more tourism services in order to achieve greater economic recovery. These demands were aimed at reducing the abrupt decline of this industry, which represents 6.3% of the Gross Domestic Product. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused more than \$2.5 billion in losses to the sector, according to data from the National Chamber of Hotels and Economic and Financial Advisors (CEFSA).

Similarly, on the 5th of June, the **Costa Rican** business community sent a proposal to the President of the Government, **Carlos Alvarado**, which they named “Pact for Employment”. The sociologist Arturo Silva [highlighted this proposal in an article for Alba Sud](#): “The text includes 113 actions that the business community considers as crucial to reactivate the economy within two years. The document is signed by 48 associations, chambers and federations from nine economic sectors: agriculture, trade, foreign trade, construction, finance, industry, technology and innovation, transport and tourism [...] In fact, the 12 cross-cutting themes summarize the structural reforms that the UCCAEP has demanded recently and can be synthesized as follows: reduction of tax and social charges; closure of public institutions and cutbacks in state personnel; participation in the formulation of public policy together with the promotion of public-private partnerships; flexibility in labour and environmental legislation; and repression of common crime and smuggling”.

The commitment of the private tourism sector in Costa Rica includes new possibilities that contrast with the traditional tourist profile that used to visit the country. For example, one of the current options concerning the coronavirus is to integrate the so-called “Travel Bubbles” into the offer. This concept aims to attract tourists who want to get away from the areas with the highest incidence of COVID19. This requires positioning the country’s tourism companies in the management of health and biosecurity protocols to generate differentiating factors against their competitors.

Another goal for Post Covid19 tourism in Costa Rica is the so-called “Executive Tourism” or high consumption. This model involves the attraction of executives,

entrepreneurs, artists and medium and high-level pensioners, by offering medical services, welfare tourism and even teleworking. In this sense, the presidents of CANATUR, **Rubén Acón**, and the Costa Rican Chamber of Hotels (CCH), **Javier Pacheco**, explained that “[there is a growing tendency for this type of visitor to retire, for long periods, to quiet places, but with excellent services, so that they don’t have to neglect their daily tasks](#)”.

It seems that the Costa Rican business community already assumes that the low number of foreign tourists will be a medium and long term concern, so they are focusing on niche and high consumption tourism. This situation differs from the SICA’s vision at a regional level, which aims to promote proximity tourism between Central American countries.

Meanwhile, **Costa Rica’s government** [has announced that it will prioritize the recovery of tourism around three fundamental areas](#). According to President **Carlos Alvarado**: “The immediate actions that the new minister will deploy are the gradual and safe opening of international flights; the implementation of tools to mitigate the financial problems of companies in the sector, and actions to reactivate the economy, always with high health safety standards through permanent communication with the health authorities”. In this regard, it is important to mention that a discussion table has been set up in Costa Rica between the Government and the tourism business association to jointly coordinate these strategies.

In **El Salvador**, [it is estimated that the tourism sector will lose about US\\$1.1 billion](#) a decline of 70% to 80% compared to 2019. The Government of El Salvador is currently in the middle of an institutional crisis that has not allowed confirmation of the dates or phases for the economic reactivation, including tourism. However, some non-essential activities are expected to gradually resume from the 24th of August.

Tourism sector representatives have proposed to the government a tax benefit plan for the industry. They also requested tax exemption and a six-month extension for income payments for the 2019 tax period for tourism companies. This is part of a general negotiation that involves reaching an agreement about a recovery plan that takes into account the needs of tourism entrepreneurs.

The **Salvadorian Ministry of Tourism** [has announced that progress is being made concerning the biosecurity protocols that will regulate the reactivation of tourism activity](#). Minister **Morena Valdez** stated that: “We have been working with the tourism sector for several weeks on the biosecurity protocols for transport, accom-

modation, food, recreation and information, which are key to safely reopening the sector, guaranteeing the health and lives of Salvadorans”.

Meanwhile, [the Government of El Salvador announced the exemption of two important taxes for all tourism companies](#). The special 5% contribution used for the promotion of tourism was not paid for three months. Similarly, an extension of 30 days for the payment of the income tax (ISR) for this industry was granted. On the other hand, since the beginning of the quarantine in the country, the government started to rent more than 40 hotels to be transformed into shelters for people who entered the country after the state of emergency was declared.

In **Guatemala**, the COVID-19 pandemic [has resulted in the total or partial closure of 82% of tourist businesses](#). According to the Association for Research and Social Studies (ASIES), “restaurants have suffered a 72% drop in sales, airlines 75% and travel agencies 80%, for an overall 82% average decrease in sales in the tourism sector [...]”. Furthermore, on average 27 percent of “tourism-related workers were fired, estimated at 457,100 jobs in 2019.”

Certainly, the impact of COVID-19 in Guatemala has also been profound, as in the rest of the countries in the region. Especially considering that tourism in this country was constantly growing. According to the **Guatemalan Tourism Institute** (INGUAT), it is estimated that 2,559,599 foreign visitors will arrive in 2019, representing a total foreign income of 1,249 million dollars.

The **Chamber of Guatemala Tourism** (CAMTUR) has considered domestic tourism as a short term alternative to help the industry recover and avoid further job losses. Accordingly, **Luis Rey**, president of this guild, [presented a proposal to reactivate the tourism sector](#) in four different phases:

- Emergency
- Economic Reactivation of the Tourism Sector
- Consolidation and Economic Growth
- Biosecurity protocols for tourism (must be approved by the city’s Medical Council and subsequently by the Health Ministry)

In this sense, Guatemala is also committed to this trend of certifying tourist destinations under biosecurity protocols or “safe destinations”. This implies permanent inter-institutional coordination with the State. For this reason, while tourism ac-

tivity remains suspended, [the central government has set up specific support programmes](#), such as the **Capital Protection Fund** through the Crédito Hipotecario Nacional bank. Likewise, INGUAT has developed a “guide to good health practices for COVID-19 “. Lastly, a **Tourism Advisory Board** has been activated, conformed by different ministries, the chambers of commerce, industry and tourism, as well as airlines, the Association of Journalists of Guatemala, hotels and tour operators.

In **Honduras**, the coronavirus crisis has caused losses of more than a billion dollars and the loss of around 100,000 jobs, according to business and government data. In this country, tourism represents approximately 6.5% of the national GDP and where about 90% of the touristic companies are micro, small and medium enterprises. This reveals a bleak picture for the industry in general and resembles the reality in nearby countries.

The tourism entrepreneurs grouped in the **National Chamber of Tourism (CANATURH)** [presented an Emergency Plan to the Government to help minimize the impact of COVID19](#) on employment and company finances. They have requested the creation of “a guarantee fund” to back up the credits of tourism companies with “preferential and long term rates”, as the sector will not achieve recovery for another year or two. They have also requested the reopening of the sector under all biosecurity conditions to avoid further losses.

The recovery plan for the tourism industry in Honduras is still not completely clear. On the one hand, [in June, a joint plan was announced](#) between the **Tourism Ministry** and the **National Chamber of Tourism** to establish “alliances” that would prevent further job losses, establish protocols to reactivate different businesses depending on the stages of the economic reopening and that would be prioritizing national tourism in the absence of foreign visitors.

However, in August, the Minister of Tourism, **Nicolle Marder**, told the local press that “[until the implementation of a tourist pass is announced, it is important to understand that this sector of the Honduran economy will not be reactivated](#)”. This is because there are still movement restrictions in the country, which are limited by identity card digits. Regarding the “tourist pass”, the minister mentioned that this is something that “they are considering” for the reactivation of the sector and that this would mean that the person could not only move on their assigned day of transit but that their hotel reservation would also function as an internal mobility ticket.



## Final thoughts

The pandemic has completely transformed tourism in all dimensions, and this context could lead to an increase in precariousness and dispossession processes, or, on the contrary, it could represent an opportunity to improve forms of tourism management that lead to an equitable, sustainable and inclusive model. An industry that considers collective and territorial rights, the socio-environmental justice of the territories where it is based and sustainability.

The global hegemonic tourism models seem to keep opting for tourist services elitization. Some destinations are already starting to implement the [safe travels certification](#) presented by the **World Travel and Tourism Council**, which intends to align and homogenize the future tourism. The large tourism companies that can develop financial strategies with credit lines and proposals for negotiation with banks are those that show an interest in accelerating the tourism reactivation.

However, this excludes small and medium-sized tourism initiatives from these proposals for immediate revival, as they have to be proposed and subjected to rigorous inspection processes. They do not have the same opportunities to renegotiate or obtain new credit lines. New migration control measures and health controls that will affect the ability of tourists to pay, will also have to be considered. On the other hand, recovery proposals in Central America are focused on tax exemptions, service fee reductions, and tax deferrals. But little has been said about the workers' vulnerability in this pandemic context, who have been most affected by staff reductions, job insecurity and lack of government support during periods of unemployment. Measures and regulations have not been proposed for the protection of employment, avoid the precariousness of work and defend labour and social security rights. In other words, the narrative of the reactivation or recovery of Central American tourism exclusively refers to the rescue of tourism companies, the coordination of regional policies, and the search for a new, increasingly elitist, tourist profile. However, proposals for regional labour policies that protects those who really support this industry, the workers in the sector, are still pending.

This pandemic context is a turning point for Central American tourism. It is time to rethink the conducting tourism methods, it is also time to build new hope in tourism management, that is, a comprehensive and holistic model based on a social and environmental ethic, diversified and capable of withstanding the crisis cycles.



# LOCKDOWN NOTES: SO, WHAT WE DO?

## POSTCOVID-19 TOURISM: SHOULD WE GO BACK TO THE SAME?

Daniel Hiernaux-Nicolas<sup>32</sup>

The World Tourism Organization's official announcement that [international tourism could show a decline of up to 30% in this year 2020](#) is most likely too optimistic (UNWTO, 2020), as two billion people are confined to their homes. Moreover, the world economy is stopped to a large extent until a crisis is resolved, whose vector is still very poorly known and its remedy among the good wishes of a science incapable of solving it in the short or medium term. Such a paradox that global capitalism's invitation to greater mobility, to enjoy a world freed from its borders, has collapsed in a brief time!

Our world has radically changed: the house becoming a “bunker”, as the researcher **Alicia Lindón (2006)** stated years ago, has become a reality to a degree that is still difficult to assume. There have been invitations to invest in the house to practice restorative cocooning of daily life pressures and work pressures<sup>33</sup>. That the house is the last refuge from a violent, complex, tormented world, could perhaps be acceptable to many. However, it becoming the only burrow of the human being, is something much challenging to assimilate.

Simultaneously, the evolution of technology has long led to an acceleration of innovations to produce electronic devices designed to connect with others, solve work online, or buy goods from a distance and receive them home. The devices that make the dwelling “intelligent”, which supposedly offer more lavish facilities for living everyday life at home, have not only multiplied in the last decade but have also made it possible to live in a more cloistered way, like medieval monks. It could be a kind of capitalist Nirvana, whose enjoyment can be advised by online coaches and mobile apps that offer relaxation techniques.

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33 Cocooning is a neologism coined by Faith Popcorn (sic), futurologist, trend seeker and marketing consultant at the end of the 1980s, which is defined as the “... *tendency for the individual to socialize less and less and to retire to their home, which converts in his strength*” (information retrieved from Wikipedia).

Simultaneously, travel has deepened personal mobility through a relative decrease in flight prices, a cheaper accommodation offered through AirBnB-type platforms, and multiple mechanisms. Thus, along with a growing voluntary domestic withdrawal, the potential of travelling for fun has spread as an escape from unbri- dled rhythms of life at work and in everyday life.

Such world mobility expansion has, in turn, been exploited by capitalism to re- duce its costs and overcome difficult moments of crisis. Capitalism looks for the places where production costs are the lowest, to identify the most exploitable com- munities through labour processes that seem to be traced back to the Middle Ages. They are some of the most widely applied strategies to get out of capitalism's re- dundant crises since the late eighties. Even so, significant and stable growth has not been recovered in developed economies, and improvement is observable in the world economy's macroeconomic indicators. Instead, improvement has been induced by China's extremely rapid growth and a few countries that have once again revitalised, albeit partially, the world economy.

In this scheme, international tourism has been managed as significant support for the world economy and the employment figures. Moreover, participation in the Global Output has been its best brand image, particularly for countries that seek to integrate into the core of contemporary capitalism. Eastern Europe countries, the contour of the Mediterranean, and some Latin American countries such as Mexico or Brazil that have become tourist powers have emerged magnified in their macro- economic results due to international tourism's rapid growth.

In this context, the global spread from the initial Chinese focus of the virus known as COVID-19, has come to break the capitalist economy's idyll with contin- ued growth. With skyrocketing hour-by-hour death and reanimation statistics, the pandemic offers terrifying images of a world that has been dislodged to its founda- tions. Reports from international agencies already relate an unprecedented global crisis with effects in all countries. Therefore, it is worth reflecting in more detail on the impact of COVID-19 on tourism, possibly one of the most affected sets of glo- balised activities.

We must remember that travel brings together almost all economic branches, so the magnitude of the crisis, which means the almost total paralysis of local and international travel, is much more severe than the numbers indicate. Statistics have always been weak due to lack of adequate information coverage, not only at the

global level but also at the national and local. A possible manipulation of information at a national and international level neither should be dismissed. The available data is essentially on international tourism, with indicators such as hotel capacity, air movements, nights/tourists, and tourist arrivals by airports<sup>34</sup>. Although the fall in these activities is substantial, the interest goes more to the multiplier effect: for each job in a hotel, it is estimated that three jobs are created in related activities, such as ground transportation, souvenirs sales, among others. Although being available, all the activities that are not considered the tourist trip's essence are not registered as such.

We are talking about entire battalions of people who work in micro-enterprises or the isolated worker's total informality (car usher, seller of clothes or food on the beach, etcetera). We know little about that, except that when tourism is booming, tourist destinations are invaded. These people are part of what the Brazilian geographer **Milton Santos** (1976) called "the lower circuit of the urban economy", in this case, the tourist economy. These are people who have been made invisible by the lack of activity deriving from the current context of official measures that urge citizens to stay at home.

The problem emanating from this observation is that the knowledge we have about tourism is based on formality, on companies recognised as such, not on the "little hands" that are used in this sector. Furthermore, most employment in so-called "formal" companies is temporary, seasonal, and very poorly paid, as stated by Ernest Cañada (2015). Those were the first people to become invisible without further compensation, joining the health crisis victims' ranks.

The tourism crisis is essentially due to a **mobility crisis**, the result of which the widely used strategy against the virus is "stay at home". Thus, all activities that could be risky due to its possible spread are cancelled. The latter include avoiding meetings of people -from the usual going to a restaurant to the cancellation of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic games- not moving, thus returning to an almost medieval model of population control in their arrivals and departures from human settlements. It has been seen in the entry closures in towns, brigades of residents stopping the entrances and exits. In short, the imposition of a confinement model. As **Néstor García**

34 For domestic or national tourism, the data are mere estimates in most countries.

**Canclini** has indicated in [a recent article](#), all of this entails severe risks for democracy, individual freedoms and the possibility of becoming a new form of governance<sup>35</sup>.

### **Public policies and corporate pressures for a return to “normality”**

It is almost impossible to determine a plausible post-virus scenario for tourism. An almost certain situation is that all governments will be pressured by factual tourism powers, which are the large hotel chains and airline lines among other actors, shielded by the “magnificent macroeconomic results” of the misnamed “smokeless industry”. The Secretary of Tourism of Mexico, **Miguel Torruco Márquez** recently mentioned that it is essential to reactivate the Mexican tourism sector because its trade surplus of 12 billion dollars a year is equivalent to the oil industry’s deficit. The latter is an excellent example of an economistic discourse that ignores the magnitude of social problems.

The tourism image has been sold through the corresponding ministries to the population and potential international tourists through multimillion-dollar advertising campaigns. Thus, it becomes clear that proposals to return to the previous state –a free movement of tourists– will receive the go-ahead of most of the population, leading to an extraordinarily high approval level.

Moreover, the ones rendered invisible will applaud these measures, yearning for a return to work at any cost. At the end of the day, the population legitimately wishes to exit its four walls, eager to restart the pursuit of the imaginary of happiness that has been patiently built by the imaginal engineering of tourism companies and by tourists themselves. The virus has located such imaginations in parentheses through restricting mobility.

However, many questions directly haunt us of this apparent victory of the current tourism model and the possible return to the previous situation, even with precautionary health measures.

In the first instance, it is worth remembering that tourism has been a great predator of nature. Should we continue like this when the need for new environmen-

35 García Canclini states, in a recent interview, that: “What happened before and during the pandemic with the technological resources of social control and with the rebellions raises doubts as to whether the current experiment with massive teleworking and isolation will be used to inhibit a long time protests (from China to Chile) or they can be used to strengthen citizen movements”. Exclusive interview with Clarín, *Ñ* magazine, April 6, 2020, under the title “[Will coronavirus crush the other ongoing struggles?](#)” Retrieved 04/26/2020.

tal awareness and action has been strongly addressed? In a certain way, the health emergency has boycotted efforts to raise awareness of climate change and the lack of operation in the medium and long term of the current economic model. When **Greta Thunberg** just finished her flimsy boat crossing of the Atlantic in Lisbon on December 3, 2019, COVID-19 had already started its sinister epic in Wuhan.

What is the future for cruise ships? Hospitals or floating cemeteries, it is unclear, to begin with, that they are still so well seen by tourists. Cruises are criticised for their little respect to the environment with the dumping of fuel in the high seas, the air pollution by carcinogenic particles from the fuel employed, the damage to coral reefs, and sewage discharge and garbage on the high seas. Cruise ships have been lethal, as noted within this crisis. However, two major powers in competition in the shipping production of cruise ships, Italy and France, both hit hard by the virus, will surely oppose by all means a necessary review of the relevance of letting such a harmful activity to prosper.

The argument that tourism is an unfailing factor of great wealth is not acceptable either. Indeed, in Mexico, for instance, the sector conceals a series of activities that generate considerable capital accumulation. Among others, created for the financial sector, such as funds of pensions that have been embedded in various activities related to tourism. The previous is articulated with particular mistreatment of workers, ridiculous salaries, long working hours, absence of days of personal matters, informal hiring, and absence of social protection, among others. Suppose it is considered that an indicator of a country's wealth is having companies and small groups of people that get rich from certain activities such as cruises. In that case, the confusion between growth and development remains.

Cruise ships are not the only case in which an unprecedented crisis of confidence is emerging regarding the security of destinations, not only of an anti-terrorist nature but also a health one. Is tourism a safe activity? Such a question will adhere to the minds of many. The index of confidence in tourism has plummeted (Hosteltur), and it is not known whether it can be quickly reversed. Despite this, many believe that, with measures such as moving restaurant tables away from each other, putting disinfectant alcohol on almost every table and observing strict sanitation in rooms or on planes, people will regain confidence, which is doubtful.

Another factor of attention is what type of public policies the states will take to support the revival of activity and population response. For example, I bring back

the memory of a seminar organised in 1992 by **Dr Roger Bergeret** at the Autonomous University of Guerrero in Mexico, after the start of the first Gulf War. During the seminar, business representatives asked the government for full support. They suggested that the Mexican population could occupy the empty rooms due to the radical reduction in American tourists' arrival. When asked whether they would sell the rooms for the national population at the price at which they used to sell the rooms to wholesalers in the United States (around 20 dollars at the time per room/night), they stated that obviously not, but at the list price in Mexico, thus, between 80 and 100 dollars. The latter is a blunt example of the attitude by which profit is privileged at all costs. Everything seems to indicate that politicians show a particular fear of provoking the anger of the population, when, according to the French secret service, urban rebellions are expected, a situation that the French sociologist **Michel Maffesoli** (2020) considers very likely due to the level of mistrust shown by civil societies throughout the world, compared to the attitude of untrusted leaders. The political class will neither confront the corporate lobbies that already demand a return to "normality" under their terms and conditions.

Finally, **unemployment and the loss of resources of many** may be factors that will affect the official will to allow a prompt reestablishment of activity.

Should we go back to the same? No, a hundred thousand times, no. Ideologically based on accumulation at all costs, mass tourism is not sustainable in any of its facets.

Besides, in the context of *global touristification* that the homonymous book authors have analysed (Cañada and Murray, 2019), a growing tourism phobia has been noted (Huete and Mantecón, 2018). Tourismphobia is understood as the rejection of tourism due to its effects on communities and localities submerged in invasive mass tourism that will start to gain weight if we go back to the previous situation. In some towns, notably Venice, local authorities have expressed their reluctance to welcome back hordes of tourists as in the past. This factor will undoubtedly have significant effects on the expected debates about the future of tourism in the most decisive towns.

The myth of tourism, the imaginary of it, has received strong blows in the last twenty years. Thus, it is time to reflect on a new tourism ethic based on respect for nature, the people residing in tourist sites, tourists and the workers at their service, and urbanised spaces as places of life, work and identity that belong to all.



There are multiple implications, such as not altogether rejecting the possibility of declaring a construction moratorium or opening of new hotels in the most crowded places. A reflection on the projects' scale is essential, as well as reconceptualising hotel buildings to make them more sustainable within smaller-scale projects (with fewer rooms, guests, and activities). Simultaneously, a radical restriction of cruises must be proposed, until operating conditions compatible with the social, maritime and terrestrial environment are established.

### **Towards reshaping tourism**

In this critical phase of renewal or perhaps re-founding of tourism, it also seems essential to focus on national tourism towards a rediscovery of local identities, values, and wealth. Likewise, it seems essential to promote small-scale, supportive, fair/equitable tourism that is respectful of people, places and identities, articulated with short cycles of tourist displacement, supply and space integrated into activities. In this sense, the reconquest of time through slow tourism, focusing on tourism on reduced spaces, would allow progress in the line of solidarity tourism with its insertion territory, which cannot be other than a micro-regional space.

Tourism responds to a subjective desire that articulates the imaginary of the loss of the lost paradise and the desire to discover, to know the other. Its management and use as means to intensively accumulate wealth, has distorted this mobilisation of personal and collective interests towards mobilisation of means to transform it into something similar to an economic activity.

It is time to rethink tourism, to give it a new face (not a mask) that makes it kinder to the planet. The COVID-19 crisis is a social crisis, not just a pandemic. Hence, it is the occasion that forces us to ask ourselves whether we should renew our acceptance for the current model or reflect on rethinking the very foundations of our relationship to tourism.

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## FROM THE «COROCLIMATIC VIRUS» TO THE RESTRUCTURING OF THE SOCIOECONOMIC SYSTEM. LET'S TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THIS MOMENT

Cati Torres<sup>36</sup>

A century ago, the Russian scientist [Vladimir Verdnasky](#) warned that “the technical and economic activity of the «civilized man» becomes itself a real geochemical force which is unknown in the evolution of life on Earth and breaks the secular balance of the biosphere”, as reminded by [Grinevald](#) (2005; p.405). Almost a hundred of years after Verdnasky’s warning, the current health crisis reminds us again of a reality we don’t want to look at. This is the reality of the dangerous impacts derived from the «geological force» which the industrial civilization metabolism has converted into as it makes an intensive use of resources, materials and energy, generates lots of waste and emissions and is responsible of important social inequalities. As if it was a «silent spring», the Covid-19 crisis today goes through the globalized, congested, busy and noisy towns and cities of the «civilized world» and, as a kind of warning, sinks them into a deafening silence.

### We urgently need to restructure the socioeconomic system

The current pandemic illustrates the fragility of human life. As with the rest of species, our existence depends on the balance of ecosystems, which if broken can lead to unpredictable consequences. During the last 300 years, it seems we have forgotten that we depend on the biosphere which we are part of where the biotic and non-biotic elements are all interconnected. The fact the atmosphere, the hydrosphere, the lithosphere and biology represent a unity obliges us to analyse and understand the biosphere from a planetary vision. This means “we need to study the response of our planet as a unified entity”, as stated for the first time by the before-mentioned Russian biogeochemical scientist when he coined the term [biosphere](#) (Margalef, 1997; p.10). Overlooking our biological connection with nature and thinking to top it all we can dominate it has led us to build a social development model which has not

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made us more resilient but more fragile. Indeed, guided by the compass of competitiveness, such a model aims at reaching an impossible goal in a finite planet: the unlimited growth in the use of materials and non-renewable energy sources which supports all types of economic growth ideologies (including the green, sustainable and inclusive ones). Such an objective provokes a massive generation of waste and emissions, thus disturbing the planetary ecological balance. Promoting an «every man for himself», our social model disregards the importance of symbiosis which, according to Lynn Margulis, “drove the evolution of life on Earth from its initial, simplest forms to the configuration of the most complex organisms and ecosystems of today’s biosphere” (Naredo, 2005: 183). Thus our socioeconomic model makes us more vulnerable because through massive deforestation and urbanization among others, it contributes to [breaking the natural barriers between animals hosting lots of viruses and other pathogens and human beings](#). Or because through the rise in the mean global temperature it causes, [it increases the probability we catch vector-borne diseases which have been usually typical of tropical regions](#).

The current health crisis should serve as a wake-up call to undertake the necessary restructuring of the socioeconomic model. The actual planetary ecological decline calls for urgent action. The growing, intensive material and energy use needed to fuel our socioeconomic metabolism and the important derived socioecological impacts lead us to an unsustainable scenario which cannot be either ecologically or socially perpetuated over the time. We have to stop advocating for a model degrading nature and millions of human lives on the basis of social inequality and infringement of fundamental human rights. Through this model, a few wealthy countries and metropolitan areas use the territory as a supplier and a waste sink, thus contributing to the social and territorial polarization both within and outside their borders. It is this model which leads us to walk on thin ice. We need to start planning and agreeing on an alternative management system which places people and nature at the core of the public policies. Such a model should be linked to a more ambitious and exciting plan oriented to improve the territories in such a way that they are moved towards more feasible and healthier ecological scenarios prioritizing people respect, care and protection. We should be concerned not only with Covid-19 but also with climate change, global nitrogen cycle disturbance, ozone layer depletion, biodiversity loss, soil erosion, air and water pollution and overfishing, among others.

We should be concerned with all the ecological conflicts which, in parallel with deep social conflicts are provoked by the industrial civilization metabolism.

### **Ecological balance is not possible without social justice**

We need to be cautious when assessing the environmental improvements we are currently observing. No doubt the economic collapse has led to an important pollution decrease in many places. The closing of lots of companies or their drastic reduction of activity and the much lower use of transportation has provoked a noticeable increase of air quality. For instance, we all have seen the NASA and the European Environment Agency figures indicating a reduction of carbon and nitrogen dioxide emissions in China and Italy. This has also happened in other regions. We have also seen an improvement of water quality in the canals of Venice, a city highly suffering from the cruise industry development, which are again transparent and home to many small fishes. We have even seen wild boars in the Diagonal in Barcelona, ducks in Andalusian highroads and dolphins in the Balearic Islands ports. It seems nature is recovering its spaces... However, we cannot ignore these environmental improvements are not the result of a socially planned and agreed strategy but a consequence of a drastic standstill of human activities which is accompanied by a high social cost. The [loss of personal freedom](#); the anxiety suffered by the most vulnerable people due to their weak health or precarious economic condition (two features which tend to happen simultaneously), which warns us this crisis will more intensively and unfairly affect the working class people if we don't implement an ambitious social crash plan; or the pressure of our health system aggravated by the lack of funding derived from the ongoing dismantling of the health care state (a phenomenon accentuated by the “austericide” policies undertaken due to the 2008 economic crisis), cannot be the social ingredients of the recipe for environmental sustainability. Environmental sustainability can only be achieved through a united, fair and egalitarian society that puts people rather than IBEX-35 at the centre of public policies.

A period of important challenges comes. [We will have to face with urgency a context of socioecological emergency](#) where the climate one is only one of its faces. Things can get even worse if the management of the actual health crisis doesn't focus on forcefully protecting all people through a social crash plan which additionally

serves as a wake-up call for the necessary, urgent restructuring of the socioeconomic system. If this management aims again at protecting the financial corporate power this leading to increase the suffering of working class people making them poorer and more vulnerable, it won't be possible to move towards more feasible and healthier scenarios. If we want to be more resilient after this crisis, we need to manage it through policies which put emphasis on protecting people rather than perpetuating status quo practices. These practices are responsible of the current situation and if nothing changes they will cause more problems in the future. Depending on how we manage it, we can move towards a scenario which is ecologically, socially more feasible and healthier or towards one which is characterized by more poverty and social vulnerability. It's up to us. No doubt, moving towards a scenario which is ecologically, socially more feasible and healthier will only be possible if we go beyond the existing socioeconomic and institutional rationale. This is why the challenges we are facing are not only important but extremely complex.

As the Canadian journalist, writer and activist Naomi Klein alerts, the [shock doctrine](#) leads the financial corporate power to take advantage of the confusion and fear provoked by the crises to demand policies and reforms favouring the powerful. What is more, the powerful have strong incentives to promote even more in collusion with the political power this fear and confusion in an attempt to further increase the control over people. We also need to fight against this «virus». We have to avoid manipulation and demand both transparency and the implementation of measures oriented to courageously protect people. We need to ensure people's rights rather than infringe on them leading people to a state of more poverty and precariousness. More vulnerable people are people who are easier to be dominated. According to Klein, managing this health crisis and its derived economic and social impacts by perpetuating or even reinforcing the existing socioeconomic model will benefit again sectors being strategic for the [global capitalism](#) development such as the financial and the tourism-real estate ones. The way we have managed the 2008 financial crash or, more recently the [Thomas Cook collapse and the Gloria storm](#), proves it.

## **We have the ingredients of the recipe for change**

More than ever, the existing socioecological emergency obliges us not to perpetuate past mistakes or [serfdoms](#). The insistent desire «to restart the economy as soon as

possible» due to the big social concern derived from both the fear and confusion of many people and the opportunism and greed of many others shouldn't be satisfied with a «more of the same» recipe. Such outdated recipe not only won't help us to better adapt to an expected future with a lesser amount of resources forcing us to degrow the deterioration of the resource base. It will convert the threats we face which are not the norm today into the rule. The goal «to restart the economy as soon as possible» should then go together with that of searching for the coevolution of our economic, political and social system with the ecological requirements of a finite planet. This should be done on the basis of a model oriented to the life's maintenance and reproduction. From a humility-based intelligent perspective, we should «restart a more humane economy». As stated by [Manfred Max-Neef](#) (2011), the winner of the Alternative Nobel Prize in Economics, “the economy is to serve the people and not the people to serve the economy”. This is a feasible goal. An important aspect shown by this health crisis is that it is possible to do things differently. It clearly shows us we have the social ingredients which are needed for the restructuring of the socioeconomic model urgently demanded by the current socioecological crisis and hence also by the health one. On the one side, we observe our institutions are taking decisions which were unconceivable some weeks ago; this showing there is a real institutional ability to react and [mobilize lots of resources](#) if institutions think the goal is worth it. On the other side, and even more relevant, this crisis is stimulating many actions by people and groups of people built on reciprocity, cooperation, solidarity and friendship principles. Such principles are not alien to the human condition, although the current socioeconomic system attempts to stifle them to convert us into competitive, selfish and individualistic human beings to ensure its surveillance. We just need to be convinced as well as convince our institutions the restructuring goal is really worth it.

The revival of these difficult days of such human attributes being latent until now should serve to this convincement. Such attributes are the nutrients needed to feed the construction of a common philosophy of human development. We have neglected this task despite the fact it is key to achieve a biosphere in harmony, as suggested by [Mumford](#) (1955) when he reasoned out his “Perspectives” during the last part of the 1955 Symposium “Man's role in changing the face of the Earth”. He argued (1955; p.492) that “if we want to achieve any degree of ecological balance, we first need to aspire to a human balance”. Therefore, it seems now is the moment



to jointly define the urgent, still non-existent, social and global goal needed to design «an action plan for life», as demanded by the actual socioecological crisis. The force of love to the Earth and our neighbours shown in the many manifestations of reciprocity, cooperation, solidarity and friendship during these last weeks should become the spark to start the engine for change. The importance of such a force was also reminded by Mumford (1955; p. 500) by using beautiful words still having a burning timeliness almost three quarters of a century later: “At this moment, we need a conciliatory and universal love [...] to rescue the Earth and all the creatures living on it from the unwise forces of hate, violence and destruction”. These words must incite reflection, but also optimism. We have the social force of love to life. We are demonstrating it. Let’s take advantage of this unusual moment to reverse once and for all the situation which has led us until here. We might not have further opportunities.

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## COVID-19 AND THE PROSPECTS FOR THE RADICAL TRANSFORMATION OF TOURISM

Raoul Valerio Bianchi<sup>37</sup>

Following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic all tourist destinations worldwide have imposed [travel restrictions](#) while 45 per cent are partially or fully closed. Despite experience of [previous disruptions](#), whether caused by terrorism, financial crises or indeed previous pandemics, few could have predicted the scope and severity of the impact Covid-19 has had on societies and economies worldwide. Such is the belief in tourism's resilience that in late January the [UNWTO](#) was predicting 3 to 4 per cent growth in tourism for 2020 while the Secretary-General stressed that "in these times of uncertainty and volatility, tourism remains a reliable economic sector".

The pandemic has not only highlighted the magnitude and scope of [tourism's global economic importance](#). It has underscored the manner in which the interconnected global architecture of tourism and associated flows of mobility act as a [vector](#) for the transmission of such pathogens, nowhere more so than on densely-crowded [cruise ships](#) that act as floating petri-dishes of incubation. The [UNWTO](#) forecasts that international arrivals could fall by 20 to 30 per cent relative to 2019 while revenues will decline by US\$350-400 billion. The [OECD](#) forecasts a 45 per cent decline in international tourism in 2020 rising to 70 per cent if the recovery is delayed until September.

That this constitutes a profound crisis and major turning point for global tourism is beyond doubt. It nevertheless remains vital that we resist [calls](#) to simply 'aid' the recovery of the industry, and to challenge interpretations of the crisis as a mere "[bump in the road](#)". While it is too early for a comprehensive analysis of the pandemic's repercussions for the political-economic structure of tourism going forward, many are optimistic that the abrupt collapse of tourism will enable destinations to [take stock](#) and to [challenge](#) the current growth trajectory of tourism and [align](#) it with the social and ecological limits. Certain destinations have already begun to rethink

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how to rebuild their tourism sectors in line with sustainability goals. For some, such as [Hawaii](#), this involves limiting visitor numbers and redirecting marketing towards smaller groups of higher-paying tourists seeking cultural and natural experiences. [Amsterdam](#) meanwhile has embraced Raworth's regenerative model of [doughnut economics](#) in order to realign the urban economy with social and environmental goals.

However, many of the responses thus far fail to consider the political logics of the impending struggles to shape the structural and organisational contours of the global tourism industries following the unprecedented shock brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. This reflection will consider some of the challenges for a radical, transformative break with growth-led, corporate-managed, resource-intensive models of tourism development, in the light of the current and emerging political-economic configurations of tourism.

### **The great disruption and emerging corporate landscapes of tourism**

Despite signs of [progress](#) a systemic paradigm shift towards more sustainable and equitable forms of tourism remains inconsistent and hindered by the relentless pursuit of growth and tourism's integral role in the continuous expansion of capitalism, a fact recognised even by many in the [mainstream media](#). Prior to the outbreak of the pandemic, sustainable tourism dialogues had begun to pivot around the [UNWTO's 2015-2030](#) sustainable tourism development agenda –framed by the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)– the central premise of which is that the transition to inclusive and sustainable tourism can be engineered through the [managed growth](#) of tourism. Despite having acknowledged the problems associated with [over-tourism](#) the UNWTO has renewed its commitment to “[sustainable growth](#)” in response to the pandemic.

That said, the pandemic has hastened the decline of the neoliberal economic orthodoxies that have fuelled three decades of hyper-globalisation and market-led growth, as [states](#) have stepped in to prevent the collapse of businesses and mitigate the effects of [spiralling unemployment](#). As a result of the suspension of travel and related ‘lockdowns’ the [WTTC](#) has forecast an unprecedented loss of 100 million tourism jobs worldwide together alongside a 30 per cent decrease (US\$2.7 billion) in tourism's contribution to global GDP. Further to the immediate cost in terms of

bankruptcies, unemployment and lost livelihoods the precise structure and power coordinates of the global political economy of tourism that will emerge in the pandemic's wake is difficult to predict. This fact is further complicated by the [hybrid](#) and composite nature of the tourism 'industries' characterised as they are by manifold inter-connections between firms of different size and capitals organised across globally-differentiated regions in an unequal division of tourism labour

The pandemic has also laid bare vulnerabilities where tourism comprises higher than average proportions of GDP and employment, not least in [Spain and Italy](#), in many ways the European epicentres of the pandemic. Even when travel restarts, domestic markets cannot easily compensate for lost international demand, although an increased emphasis on domestic tourism is likely in the [short-term](#). Tourism supply is by its very nature perishable, nor can tourism and hospitality infrastructures be easily repurposed for alternative economic usage. An exception perhaps are [hotel real estate assets](#) that can potentially be sold to release liquidity, although commercial real estate activity has also [slowed considerably](#).

It is estimated that [global hotel supply](#) will contract by 2 per cent. While most corporate hotel groups are likely to survive thanks to a combination of state aid and private financing, the many thousands of small to medium sized firms which make up around [80 per cent](#) of global tourism [struggle](#) to access emergency government assistance. Despite sizeable [cash reserves](#) and [access to finance](#) many of the corporate digital platforms which had been driving significant market concentration in recent years have announced major [restructuring plans and job losses](#), although it is likely that some will [consolidate](#) and expand their market position.

The crisis has also laid bare the tensions between the interests of global capital and transnational corporations on the one hand and those of states on the other. Companies that have consistently preached the virtues of [low tax-regulatory regimes](#) are now amongst the most fervent proponents of state aid, not least the airline industry which may face global revenue losses of [US\\$250 billion](#) and a permanent loss of [750,000 jobs](#) in the US alone. Aggressive [lobbying](#) has enabled airlines to secure vital state aid to stay afloat. While there is a clear rationale and urgent need to provide support for laid-off workers in industries that employs [tens of millions](#) of workers, cheap air travel has been a major contributor to the relentless growth of tourism and [carbon emissions](#).

Most governments have stopped short of taking airlines into [public ownership](#), with the exception of *Alitalia*. Rather than simply bail out this sector the crisis provides an opportunity for states to orchestrate a transition to sustainable transport systems aligned with improved working conditions and binding emissions targets. Indeed, [Air France-KLM](#) has been granted a combined French-Dutch state aid package of around €10 billion in return for a commitment to halve emissions by 2030 and suspend dividend payments. US airlines in contrast have merely been encouraged to “[refrain](#)” from using bailout money for [share buy backs](#) or dividend payments until September 2021, and to limit executive pay until late March 2022. Although it too is a major [employer](#) the ‘US’ cruise industry –in which three companies account for [75 per cent](#) of the global cruise market– was nevertheless [excluded](#) from the US\$500 billion corporate bail-out fund by virtue of the fact that they have worked to systematically minimize their tax liabilities and circumvent strict labour and environmental standards by sailing under overseas ‘flags of convenience’.

There are signs too that the pandemic may hasten geo-political and economic [power shifts](#) that were already apparent prior to the outbreak. While weaker states may suffer as [foreign investment](#) moves out of emerging markets, Chinese investors had already been busily acquiring Western tourism, hotel and property assets prior to the pandemic, including such iconic European tourism brands as [Club Méditerranée](#) and [Thomas Cook](#). Thanks to sizeable foreign currency reserves and demand for domestic travel, well-capitalized state-backed Chinese enterprises are well placed to withstand the economic fallout and to step up investments into major tourism, hospitality, [aviation](#) and real estate assets.

Those most severely impacted by the pandemic are the millions of vulnerable workers and small enterprises in [small islands](#) and other [low-income tourism destinations](#) across the Global South. Without international financial assistance these states will be hard pressed to keep local tourism businesses afloat and furlough workers and are likely see their public debt burdens rise. A major proportion of global tourism and hospitality [workers](#) comprise women and/or migrants often working in the informal sector with little or no recourse to state support and social protection. Notwithstanding greater access to state support, tourism and hospitality workers in wealthy states too have not been spared. In the US [98 per cent](#) of Unite Here trade union members have lost their jobs while [trades unions](#) in Europe estimate that almost the entire 12m strong hospitality workforce has either been furloughed, or been

made redundant. Meanwhile a significant number of low-paid cruise ship workers, many of whom hail from developing countries, remain [stranded at sea](#) and unable to return home.

### **Towards democratic, equitable and sustainable tourism?**

In her critically acclaimed analysis of “disaster capitalism” [The Shock Doctrine](#), [Naomi Klein](#) cites noted free market thinker Milton Friedman to underscore how crises serve to catalyse sharp transitions towards new political-economic orders:

*“Only a crisis – actual or perceived – produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas lying around”.*

The Covid19 pandemic has all the attributes of just such a crisis but whose repercussions are global in scale and of potentially [greater severity](#) than the 1930s depression. Much has been made of the fact that the pandemic has given us time to take breath and to rebuild tourism economies along more [sustainable and regenerative](#) principles. However, the restructuring of post-pandemic tourism economies will entail much more than appeals to [morality](#) or simply for tourism to [“grow back better”](#) as proposed by the UNWTO.

To paraphrase climate activist [Bill McKibben](#), progressive voices in tourism may have begun to win the argument but we are far from winning the struggle to catalyse the transformation towards a just, sustainable and democratically-managed tourism political economy. Further to the challenges posed by the complex structure and organisation of the tourism ‘industries’, without a coordinated transnational programme of action to neutralize the grip of markets and capital on tourism governance, it will be hard for states to resist [commercial pressures](#) to restore growth and profitability and to push back against [corporate lobbying](#) demanding the loosening of fiscal ‘burdens’ and “restrictive” social and environmental regulations.

Progress is also hindered by the lack of an agreed consensus regarding the precise form equitable and sustainable post-pandemic models of tourism might take. These range from scattered micro-alternatives to mass tourism, modest innovations and market remedies to more radical proposals for degrowth. What many proposed solutions have in common is a disconnection from political economy and the invis-



bility of the [contested class relations](#) that shape and determine distributive outcomes and which are often concealed in pluralist framings of tourism political economy. The danger is that technocratic and possibly authoritarian recovery strategies will be by delivered governments and corporations merely in consultation with ‘stakeholders’. The expertise of digital tech companies may also be harnessed by states to deploy data analytics and ‘[smart](#)’ technologies for the management of tourist mobility and border crossings in the interests of ‘public safety’. Such responses promote technical solutions abstracted from politics. As such they risk accentuating an expanding architecture of corporate-managed [surveillance capitalism](#) that undermines principles and structures of [democratic participation](#),

The precise pathways to recovery and transformation will vary according to the structure and organisation of tourism in local contexts and the changing tectonics of global macro-economic forces. The emerging landscapes of global tourism capitalism will nevertheless present considerable challenges for any kind of coordinated response from labour and civil society as renewed struggles over strategically located ‘tourism assets’ intensify.

There have been promising proposals ranging from [localizing destination value-chains](#) to fostering the [inclusion of women in decision-making](#). However, a more radical shift to an equitable-green model of tourism will require a multi-scalar and robust politics of intervention that can challenge the nexus of commercial-financial-political interests who have [abetted the relentless growth of tourism](#) and expansion of capital accumulation through land grabs, privatizations, regulatory liberalization and real estate-driven strategies of tourism development. The resurgence of states as critical economic actors nevertheless provides a vital opportunity to decouple tourism development decision-making from speculative capital flows and short-term profiteering and, looking further ahead, to widen and deepen democratic-civic participation in the management and socialisation of the assets and resources upon which tourism and associated human livelihoods depend.



## TOURISM, DEGROWTH, AND THE COVID-19 CRISIS

Robert Fletcher, Ivan Murray, Macià Blázquez, Asunción Blanco<sup>38</sup>

Just a few short months ago, popular media were filled with debate concerning “[overtourism](#)”: the presence of increasing numbers of tourists in popular destinations throughout the world, leading to conflict with and complaint by residents concerned that this influx was making their homes unlivable. Now, in an instant, everything has changed. The global tourism industry has ground to a halt, and consequently concern for overtourism has been replaced with newfound worry that “[undertourism](#),” previously a marginal issue, will instead threaten the future of economies and societies worldwide.

The scale and implications of the current tourism slowdown are staggering. Depending on how one defines it, tourism can be considered the largest industry in the world. The [United Nations World Tourism Organization](#) claims, indeed, that tourism accounts for 10% of global GDP and hence 1 out of every 10 jobs worldwide. Places that depend on tourism for the majority of their income, like [Bali](#), have already been hit hard by the slowdown. Short-term rental platforms like Airbnb have [been crippled](#) as well.

All told, the [World Travel and Tourism Council](#) forecasts that recession caused by the COVID-19 pandemic could ultimately eliminate 50 million tourism jobs worldwide, with losses to the US industry alone totalling [24 billion dollars](#). The knock-on effects of this would ripple throughout the world since tourism is so interconnected with other important industries including air transport, oil production, hospitality and retail sales.

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## Crisis and Opportunity

Yet as the saying goes, every crisis is also an opportunity. The present likelihood, as [Naomi Klein](#) warns, is that dominant forces will try to exploit this crisis as an excuse to implement the by-now familiar [disaster capitalist](#) playbook. This entails pushing through further privatization and corporate consolidation of the type that occurred, for instance, in tourism reconstruction throughout Asia [following the 2004 tsunami](#). We are already seeing signs of this in the rush by [airline, hotel and restaurant operators](#) to capture the bulk of proposed state bailout packages in the US and elsewhere.

Yet as Klein also points out, there is also potential to ensure that this crisis does not produce more elite capture, but instead presents an opportunity to take back control of our spaces and societies. When overtourism was still the main concern, one of the responses gaining increasing support was a call for tourism “degrowth” as part of a [degrowth transition](#) more broadly. We highlighted this discussion in a previous [blog post](#) as well as a [special issue](#) of the *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* republished as an [edited volume](#) this month.

It is important to emphasize, as the [degrowth.info editorial team](#) explains, that the current global recession should not be confused with degrowth. Degrowth calls for a voluntary, planned contraction rather than the haphazard reaction the pandemic has forced upon us. But as the editorial team also points out, the crisis signals that degrowth is both necessary and possible.

This is certainly true for the tourism industry. Even if the COVID-19 crisis ends relatively soon, we cannot afford to return to levels of travel experienced previously, particularly by the wealthiest segment of the world’s population. This is not only because of the social unrest overtourism provoked, but also because the industry’s environmental damages (including climate change as well as pollution and resource depletion) which were already beyond unsustainable.

Despite the heavy toll it has exacted economically and socially, the COVID-19 crisis has seen many of these impacts [diminish substantially](#) in an extremely short amount of time. Hence, we need to use this moment to proactively plan for voluntary tourism downsizing beyond the current crisis as part of an overarching society-wide degrowth programme in pursuit of [post-capitalism](#).

## Lessons from the Leading Edge

The current crisis offers a number of important lessons for this effort. First, it demonstrates how dangerously dependent the world's economy has become upon a very volatile tourism industry. This is not just in terms of tourism's preponderance in particular locations but also the tourism industry's role in the global economy more generally. As [David Harvey](#) explains, the current capitalist growth model relies on ever-increasing intensification and acceleration to continually reduce the turnover time of invested capital. As an industry that [sells transient experiences instantaneously consumed](#), tourism is a central element of this model.

The [degrowth.info](#) team rightly calls on us to “reflect on why we constantly feel compelled in contemporary society to be always on-the-go, be it from one activity to the next or from one continent to another for a 5 day holiday.” But merely reducing our individual travel would have serious implications for global economic futures as well as for the countless destinations now hopelessly dependent on tourism revenue. These issues would need to be addressed at a much more structural level too.

Second, the crisis demonstrates that societies can in fact directly control the amount of tourism they experience when they choose to do so. In the overtourism debate, governments often claimed that the problem was out of their hands since they could not stop people from traveling. The widespread restrictions on mobility we are now experiencing show this to be untrue.

This is not to suggest that such top-down suppression of freedom of movement should continue indefinitely. But it does show what is possible – and politically acceptable – when this movement needs to be brought in line with life-threatening demands like COVID-19. The need for a livable planet surely provides another important ‘reason’ for rethinking what volume of movement is sustainable.

## Towards Touristic Degrowth

Third, and most importantly, current responses to the economic slowdown point to the types of things that can and must be done to guide the tourism industry towards a (relatively) smooth degrowth transition. Individually, of course, we all need to rethink our priorities to take fewer, slower and more meaningful trips. But this must

be coupled with institutional change to reign in the tourism industry on a macro, structural level. This should include the following measures among others:

- Direct restrictions on the quantity of mass transport –and especially airplanes– reaching a given destination. Use of private jets and superyachts should be banned altogether.
- Equitable allocation of space within this mass transport. If space is merely sold to the highest bidder, then of course only the rich will be able to travel. Instead, space must be distributed, and costs prorated, to ensure opportunities for travel across the social spectrum.
- Strong disincentives for non-essential and very short-term travel. This can be achieved via visitor taxes graduated according to one's reasons for travel as well as length of stay, such that shorter and more frivolous trips would be taxed much more heavily (as already occurs to a degree in [Venice](#)).
- Public investment in communication technologies and infrastructure so that more group interactions can be effectively conducted online instead of face-to-face.
- Establishing a substantial carbon tax for transport (both mass and individual) that remains. This could also be graduated depending on the nature and time-frame of such transport.
- The types of subsidies being offered to the tourism industry under current bailout packages must be sustained beyond the crisis. But these subsidies should be disproportionately concentrated on small and medium-sized businesses rather than the large conglomerates currently demanding the lion's share of proposed funding due to their unequal lobbying power.
- And these subsidies should, at the very least, include requirements to invest in more sustainable (social and environmental) practices, as [others have proposed](#). Even better, subsidies could finance [de-touristification projects](#), especially in oversaturated spaces.
- Such subsidies could be funded through a combination of new visitors' fees, carbon taxes and redirection of current state revenues (e.g. military spending).
- Development of communitarian and/or state-owned projects for organizing holidays and leisure time not driven by profit, but rather by the exchange of socially beneficial experiences.

- In a degrowth scenario, many existing businesses would still need to shut down. To minimize loss of employment, remaining jobs should be shared as part of an overall reduction in working hours (coupled with increase in hourly pay). This would need to be subsidized through state support, as would unemployment benefits and retraining for workers forced to move to other sectors.
- This should be coupled with development of diversified alternative enterprises to make economies less reliant on tourism overall. This effort should also aim to re-localize economic activity to make destinations less vulnerable to vicissitudes of global markets generally.
- All of this would, ideally, be supported by introduction of a [universal basic income](#), as some degrowth proponents have proposed, so that no one would be wholly dependent on tourism for their subsistence.
- Finally, international development aid should be used to assist low-income societies to implement these various measures.

These measures are merely the tip of the iceberg of all that will be needed to ensure that recovery from the COVID-19 crisis leads us towards a more equitable and sustainable world. But they would be a good first step in this direction.

## SO, WHAT HAPPENS AFTER ALL THIS?

Margalida Ramis<sup>39</sup>

Days and weeks go by; there are plenty of analysis and reflections being published in various media. We are in an unprecedented situation, and a profound crisis of globalised neoliberal capitalism is anticipated - some speak of a change of era - full of uncertainties, but which simultaneously reveals many inherent certainties that have been tirelessly denounced and fought from the social left and political environmentalism.

From my perspective, the articles that explain why a global pandemic of this size has occurred and, above all, why it has made us so vulnerable are especially interesting. In this sense, and to begin territorialising the crisis, I take as a starting point the article published in Alba Sud “[Cultural singularity as a cause of the spread of COVID-19 in Spain: a response](#)” by **Ivan Murray** and **Ernest Cañada**.

In the case of the Balearic Islands, we are a wholly touristified territory and economy. Like us, many territories and cities in the world have specialised in tourism in a globalised and hyper-connected world in which we have allowed “others” to provide us with basic essential services. At the same time, we dedicated ourselves to making territory and people available to fatten the profits of the tourism industry, investors, and markets. In return, jobs in sectors directly linked to tourist services (hotels, bars, restaurants, travel agencies, and car rental companies, etcetera) and others indirectly related to being suppliers of those that have been considered tourism indirectly (food and beverages, construction, primary sector products, textiles, laundry, electricity, water and gas, maintenance, consultants, service companies for tourism companies, etcetera). Increasingly precarious jobs, in many cases not regularised, low qualification and low recognition, which are the ones that will now suffer more directly and dramatically the effects derived from the COVID-19 crisis. This will be the case both due to the current abrupt paralysis of the economy following confinement -which in many cases already survived due to a daily subsistence economy-,

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but strongly, due to the post-COVID-19 economic scenario. This capitalist dead end will have in the tourism sector the most devastating effects.

Faced with this immediate and future reality, **what response can be given from political and social environmentalism?** The total paralysis that the COVID-19 health crisis has represented for the economy, but also and, above all, for our daily lives, unfolds as a space for reflection. But not only that. The current situation could end up representing a reset to the system. We have stopped short, and now we should focus well, and change direction towards sustainable, fair, and democratic societies.

### **Denouncing the irrational logic of capitalism**

When rethinking this new direction, from environmentalism, we do not start from scratch. We have **long denounced the irrational logic of neoliberal capitalism that, in our territory, has the tourist industry as its maximum exponent.** Furthermore, we have long denounced the impact that this model has had on the territory and the people, which acts with an extractivist logic in the territories it colonises – as **Joan Buades** expresses in the documentary [Tot inclòs: danys i conseqüències del turisme a les nostres illes](#). Environmentalism has denounced the overexploitation of natural resources, the destruction of the territory by wild urbanism linked to speculative economies derived from the tourism-construction binomial, in which the forward exits of our island economy have pivoted in the face of other preceding systemic crises. We have denounced the destruction of infrastructures that exceed the carrying capacity of a limited island territory. Nevertheless, we have also denounced the platform economy that has erupted violently in recent times, facilitating tourism commercialisation in our own homes. All under a false narrative of “community” and with the deception of the democratisation of tourist benefits, when what it was doing was making an essential good such as housing available to commercial logics, confronted and subjecting the fundamental right to have decent housing to the tourist commodification of our homes, which has generated an unprecedented social fracture, which now, with the COVID-19 crisis and the obligation of confinement, has become more than evident: homeless people, rent strike, overcrowding in the poorest neighbourhoods of our cities, etcetera.



## Redirecting the economy, U-turn

We are not only left with the report of the impacts on the territory, resources, and people. We have long pointed to the need to **refocus the economy towards resilience and the recovery of sovereignty in the means of production**. Climate crisis is the argument that in recent times has given us the strength to influence this debate. Once the state of climate “emergency” was declared by the institutions, we began to ask for a realistic assumption of the state of emergency. Therefore, a genuine political and social assumption of the urgency of starting to make a radical change of model, focusing the production sectors’ strategic priorities that provide the basic necessities to sustain life and produce decent conditions to sustain dignified lives. That is, production not from the point of view of the logic of capital accumulation for a few at the expense of the precarious labour force of many, but rather from the perspective of sustaining life, and social and environmental justice. New ways of conceiving the public and, maybe even exploring new formulas of public-cooperative cooperation, instead of the usual public-private or total privatisations that have turned production into a capital against life struggle.

It is necessary to review what needs to be produced to become a stronger society in the face of the adversities that we know will come: climatic, as in the case of the Gloria storm, social, due to peak oil or materials peak, due to geopolitical issues or due to ruptures of structures of global tourist capitalism, as it seemed that the bankruptcy of the tour operator giant Thomas Cook must be.

In the climate emergency framework, we demanded a turning point in policies to break with the inertia of a model that already showed its vulnerabilities every time some external phenomenon brought unbalance. We demanded, specifically and among others, a stoppage of all the works and planning of new infrastructures scheduled in times of real estate and tourist expansion and that, in a climate crisis scenario, would lose all meaning: airport expansion, roads, ports, etcetera. We demanded the declassification of undeveloped urban and developable land that becomes land for real estate speculation by international vulture funds to construct luxury homes, while society is in a state of housing emergency. We demanded the reduction of tourist places and the consensual and strategic planning of the economy’s destination. We demanded a review of public budgets aimed at examining the economic metabolism of our society and planning the costs associated with a

real socio-ecological transition in the framework of an uncertain future, but which will foreseeably chain one crisis after another, and before which we need to focus towards building a resilient society.

As **Yayo Herrero** highlighted in the talk she made on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April, “[Coronavirus: Perspectives with life at the centre](#)”, with **Eva García Sempere**, we must rethink: 1) what needs must be satisfied (produce in terms of life instead of demand); 2) what ought to be produced to satisfy basic needs to sustain dignified lives for everyone; and 3) assess what the socially necessary jobs are.

Given this, the [GOB](#) has asked to be present not solely in the participatory bodies that address territorial, urban and environmental issues. We also want to be in the organisations that address the economic model, where the companies and employers of the Balearic Islands’ economic sectors are, and unions as social agents. As a capital social agent to face the climate emergency scenario, we consider that environmentalism must provide the necessary vision to guarantee that the current crisis solution will be met in terms of social, climate and environmental justice. Life above the capital. Life at the centre, that of people and all the biodiversity and natural resources necessary to sustain life, because we are eco-dependent beings, something that unduly seems we have forgotten. Ecofeminism, ecological economics, and social environmentalism values must be present within the new scenarios that arise from the current crises. When making these demands –2 or 3 months ago– we faced the climate crisis scenario. Now we continue in a state of climate emergency to which we must add the health crisis of COVID-19. A pandemic that not only represents an unprecedented health crisis but rather has highlighted a much deeper and more structural crisis that is the crisis of the economic system and capitalist societies.

## COVID-19 rushes change

Thus, suddenly, we have been immersed in a crisis on a global scale: confinement, and the collapse of the entire global production chain, in a world that has subjected life to the hyper-globalised and hyper-connected market logic. We now realise that we are in a world that has dismantled essential public services and privatised common goods, which has dismantled the common and collective, established in urban environments. Under the question of “security”, it has generated inequalities and privileges and has fuelled fascism. It becomes evident to us that this “global”

diagnosis has an identical reading on the local scale that we inhabit where the hegemonic way of life (in its economic, political and social dimensions) has not been questioned at all and, therefore, we are one more piece of this global reality that has now escaped our (human) hands.

Landing our analysis, territorialising on our island scale, that of a Mediterranean society (more) linked to tourism, we give ourselves our vulnerability and the few mechanisms we have to deal with the situation. Even worse, now we no longer have the time to make a transition more or less in the short or medium term, which seemed to be the margin to assume –politically, economically, and socially– the climate change, despite the urgency that we reported. No, now we no longer have this transition time. The almost only and exclusive economic sector that sustains the Islands' economy (at the cost of territory and people, natural resources, and precariousness) has fallen suddenly. Moreover, yes, the fact that we and the economic and daily activities of a system in crisis that we continued to maintain despite the evidence, have come to a standstill, gives nature a break. However, this is not the recipe to follow because it is a truce and with too high a social cost, among other things due to the human suffering it implies and the loss of collective freedoms.

**Social environmentalism has a medium-term response, for a transition scenario (which is still equally necessary). But what about the immediate time?** We need to address a tricky situation in which thousands of people on the Balearic Islands will suddenly be directly affected by their job loss. Some may be temporary, many permanent, because the activity level will not be resumed due to many tourism promotion campaigns, tax or environmental reductions they want, or intent to implement. Whoever demands it is because: either they are not aware of the magnitude of the global impact that the COVID-19 crisis has unleashed, or they intend to take advantage of the situation for their benefit. We realise that both positions will appear. Unaware, on the one hand, and influential on the other, will intend to maintain their privileges at the cost of lives if necessary.

No, everything indicates that it will not be possible to emerge from this crisis as from the 2008 crisis (with a very high social cost): with austericidal reductions, bank and business bailouts, and more tourism and more construction as a local recipe, at the expense of territory, resources and social and salary guarantees. Because never before has the local and global production chain been abruptly broken. There will be panic in the financial markets and tourism, the second world economy after oil,

will acutely suffer the impact of this global unemployment and will be the sector that will have the most challenging recovery (according to data from the OECD and UTAH) exposed by **Iolanda Fresnillo** in the webinar organised by the ODG “[Coronavirus and economic crisis: social shock and recovery plan](#)”.

Therefore, we need our **proposed agenda for the eco-social transition** to consider this immediate required perspective. For this reason, we point out some of the issues that we consider basic and essential as an initial shock plan focused on social and environmental justice in order to focus once and for all on where post-COVID-19 policies should tend in a hyper-touristified society and economy:

1. It is essential to **paralyse the proposals to “recover” the rhythm and conditions of the situation that preceded COVID-19**. We must remember that this situation was not right for everyone, only for a few. Therefore, from social and political environmentalism we are compelled to make a robust social block to face the requests for reductions in environmental requirements that will try to ignore the urgent climate crisis awaiting us after having overcome the current health crisis and that must be the clear and present framework of future policies. We cannot ignore the climate crisis. Our house, everyone’s, is still on fire, as **Greta Thunberg** used to say.
2. A **social rescue plan is necessary for workers in the sectors directly and indirectly linked to the tourism sector**. Perhaps now is the time to guarantee a basic social income for those workers who will lose their job immediately and permanently.
3. A **taxation review** is also necessary, with aid to the most vulnerable social sectors and the active and supportive involvement of companies currently only seeking to avoid decapitalisation by dismissing staff. The demands of those who always win cannot be answered: [Exceltur](#) asks for a rescue plan for tourism companies demanding, among other issues, the forgiveness and moratorium on the payment of taxes and social security contributions, as **Gabriel Escarrer** explores [in a recent interview in El Economista](#).

4. To advance from here on the democratic deepening of decision-making to overcome this health crisis and guarantee that the crisis and economic paralysis do not become a new excuse to increase ecological deterioration, the impoverishment of the majority and the violation of the most elementary rights, we consider it essential **to urgently create a Working Group. It needs to encompass all political, business, and social actors - not solely unions - for a progressive refocusing of budget policies to ensure that the economy takes root in the territories, relocating, simplifying, and shortening economic circuits.** For all this, we propose:

- Enable a universal basic income, but not only. It can represent a solution to face the immediate crisis of people without income or with insufficient income. However, as Amaia Pérez Orozco indicates in an [interview with eldiario.es](https://eldiario.es), we must go beyond providing an individual solution. In the long run, it is necessary to opt for reducing the level of income needs and collectivise and de-commodify essential factors to sustain life (home, education, health, food, etcetera). In this sense, the focus is on being able to guarantee essential and universal public services.
- Deepen into a refocusing of policies towards essential productive sectors considered strategic in the new economic metabolism scenario focused on relocation, resilience and the recovery of sovereignty, social justice, and environmental and climate justice. That is, relocation of the production to move towards a self-centred (and not rentier) model that addresses how production works and what essential services are provided (social and solidarity economy).
- Recover public management of strategic productive sectors (energy, water, health, education, care, etcetera).
- Increase social control over tourism companies. If tourism must continue to have a confident presence in an economic diversification scenario, perhaps directed towards a closer tourist experience and internal consumption, it is needed first to guarantee activity within the framework of inexcusable environmental priorities. Secondly, ensuring social performance and therefore, the distribution of wealth it generates. If tourism is still considered

a “strategic” sector to emerge from the crisis, new paradigms of ownership and redistribution of resources are needed. Why not think about increasing the mechanisms of public, union, and social control over its operation? Why not advance in the construction of new forms of public-cooperative management alliances? Why not opt for forms of certain tourist activities public management?

- Promote a training plan for the generation of social competencies in the new production areas linked to territory and resources management.

All in all, we need to think of ourselves as a whole, as a society, to jointly address the fear of the uncertainty of the future that has precipitated the COVID-19 crisis and guarantee that the exit will not be a general free-for-all. Perhaps this is the most radical essential change in the *modus operandi* known so far in which large institutions watch over large capital at critical moments. If we achieve this, perhaps this current crisis will have genuinely been the turning point for the necessary change to flout economic, political, and social hegemonies that have brought us to the current situation, both in the global context and at home. Here, in the Balearic Islands, thinking about this possibility is acceptable, due to the dimensions and the number of actors involved. However, the key is that everyone is aware that the island is our ship and that we will all have to row together to avoid sinking. This is the great challenge.

## PANDEMIC: OPPORTUNITIES AND DISPUTES IN THE NEXT TOURISM IN ARGENTINA

Rodrigo Fernández Miranda & Verónica Dziencielsky<sup>40</sup>

The global crisis generated by the Covid-19 pandemic opens up new lines for reflection on society and the economy in general, and on tourism activity in particular. This situation has no precedent from which to grasp to assess the way in which the eventual exit will take its course. It is a [total social fact](#) that shakes social actors, substantially modifies their relationships and their ways of life, and has repercussions on all local, national and global institutions.

For the first time in history, the globalized economic system, as well as the movement of goods and people, was practically forced to stop. Along these lines, the World Tourism Organization ([UNWTO](#)) states that all of the two hundred and seventeen tourist destinations on the planet have introduced [restrictions on international travel](#), which are the most rigorous in history.

An absolute centrality is also observed in communication and the construction of meanings. The production of news and the dissemination of speeches revolves around the virus with the analysis and recommendations of experts, the constant updating of the figures of infections and deaths, and the consequences on societies. There has also been a non-minor display of misinformation and fake news.

In Argentina, with its deep historical structures of inequality, this irruption adds to a period of social and economic crisis generated by a new cycle of neoliberal policies since 2016. It is expected that the peak of infections in the country will arrive weeks after the production of this text due to the preventive and compulsory lockdown dictated early by the National Government. So far, the numbers of those affected are significantly lower than in other countries in the region and the world. However, the virus began to circulate strongly in the popular neighborhoods of the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires in May. There, living conditions are marked by overcrowding, precariousness and lack of access to essential services.

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Assuming the complexity that this implies, the aim of this article is to decipher some keys that allow an approximation to the possibilities of transformation of tourism in the near future, once the situation of health emergency ends. Some triggering questions for analysis are: What impacts could this crisis have on tourism? What perspectives do central actors foresee? Will there be changes in tourism consumption practices? And, finally, what contributions and opportunities for tourism can be promoted from the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE)?

## **Tourism and pandemics**

The economic consequences of the pandemic are still of unknown dimensions, although there are some certainties. First, different international organizations forecast the most serious and deepest crisis since the Great Depression. Second, in the same vein as the health crisis, the economic crisis will have a greater impact on the most vulnerable social sectors.

In the case of tourism, there will be companies, workers, destinations and consumers that will be much more impacted than others. Some companies will stop winning and others will lose or disappear. Certain destinations will be deeply affected by the lack of demand, with their communities suffering an increase in unemployment, migration, inequality or social exclusion, and having to reconvert their productive matrix. Some of the workers in the sector will lose their jobs and the middle and popular sectors will have less capacity for tourism consumption.

However, beyond the expected particular impacts, the central question is to inquire about the consequences that the pandemic may have on the tourism model. In this regard, it is interesting to evaluate what possibilities for real change exist in the dominant modes of tourism production and commercialization and in the relationships and power correlations between the actors involved. Although with nuances, the exit offers the following dilemma: a return to the previous normality or a paradigm shift. It is precisely in this second option where possibilities get opened for the Social and Solidarity Economy.

## Tourism, before

As in many other countries, tourism in Argentina was radically swept away by the outbreak of Covid-19. Tourism did not decrease, but stopped at practically zero. Going back a bit, to illustrate the previous starting point, a brief characterization of tourism in the country is proposed.

From a brief historical perspective, we can highlight how the first tourist centers in the country were founded at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Though, it was not until the first Peronist government (1946 - 1952) that the so-called democratization of tourism occurred thanks to the expansion of rights, such as paid vacations and the improvement in the living conditions of the working sectors. Since then the activity has been growing and expanding, gaining prominence on the economic, social and cultural levels.

Currently, the country receives more than 7 million international visitors a year with a significant increase in recent years as a consequence, among other factors, of the devaluation of the national currency. Some 50% of Argentines (21 million) practices tourism, whereas only 10% travels abroad (AET, 2015).

According to the Association of Tourism Hotels ([AHT](#)), the sector represents the fourth item in the inflow of foreign currency. In 2018, the total turnover was more than 55 billion dollars, which represents 10.3% of GDP: the weight of tourism on the Gross Domestic Product is four times greater than that of software, clothing and textiles. Tourism is also the main activity in terms of job creation: the sector as a whole generates approximately one million formal jobs. And the number of informal employment is uncertain.

In the last decades, there has been a constant growth of travel, infrastructure and tourism beds that has been massifying and hyperturistifying the country's destinations. This process has not been innocuous in any case, but has generated various impacts; for example, on workers' quality of life (Mazzini, 2009) as well as residents' quality of life (Benseny, 2006), environmental deterioration (Dadón, 2002) or the destruction of resources (Fernández Miranda, 2015).

## Pandemics, actors and discourses

As a first look at the future scenario, the discourses of the public and business sectors are summarized below. This can help us to approach to dominant actors' formulations.

**Public actors.** The Ministry of Tourism and Sports of the Nation highlights that the tourism sector is the most affected by the pandemic and estimates that some 200 thousand jobs could be lost. In this regard, it is proposed to implement a plan “[that allows the private sector to remain standing](#)” once the health crisis is finished. This would be accompanied by the articulation of dialogue tables with business chambers and unions.

Aid plans are planned for entrepreneurs through the Emergency Assistance Program for Work and Production and specific measures for the sector, such as financing through the Plan 50 Destinations. Part of public aid to “[guarantee the payment of private sector salaries](#)” during the crisis. Through the Tourism Fund, half a million dollars will be allocated “[to support tourism entrepreneurs who develop sustainable projects that promote employment, roots and human development in the territory.](#)”

Public sector's discourse points out the role of tourism as a generator of work and highlights positive expectations about its recovery, “[it will be one of the industries that will reactivate faster when this situation ends.](#)” As a priority, the actions of the State aim to “[save](#)” the sector, achieving a “[reactivation](#)” as quickly as possible. As an ideal short and medium term horizon, it is proposed to return to the tourism situation prior to the pandemic.

**Business actors.** First, companies and tourism lobbies statements highlight all damages caused by the pandemic and the quarantine. Two ideas embedded in these narratives are the closure of SMEs and travel agencies, as well as job losses. Unlike other sectors, there is no pressure to make quarantine more flexible in the statements of private tourism actors. They assume that there would still be suspicion from consumers about practicing tourism. Psychosociocultural consequences are also expected that will affect tourism practices beyond lockdowns, such as “[dread](#)”, “[prejudice](#)” or the difficulty in “[eradicating fear](#)” to the virus.

These speeches do not coincide with the optimism of the State about the times of “[recovery](#)” of the sector: “[The most optimistic predictions indicate that all of 2020 is completely lost. The few say that tourism could only return to normal within two](#)

[years](#).” Regarding the proposals, private actors request a transfer of public resources to mitigate the impacts and be able to return to a situation similar to the previous moment. Meanwhile, the giants of online agencies took action with [the suspension of employees and the reduction of salaries](#) until the end of September “[to guarantee the sustainable development of the company in the long term](#),” based on an agreement with the Commerce Union trade.

There is harmony, similarities and complementarities between the discourses of public sector and private tourism actors. The State offers what private agents request, both raise the need to return to the situation just before the outbreak of the pandemic as quickly as possible. The main difference rests upon the optimistic or pessimistic emphasis of their prospects. These discourses share, in addition to a marked economic orientation, significant silences regarding social and environmental issues. It is key to contemplate these invisible dimensions in this rhetoric in order to complete the illustration about the consequences of the pandemic on tourism activity.

The first shocking images from the lockdown were about wild animals in cities, clean waters when those some weeks ago were turbid, or data registering the reduction of pollution. Regarding social aspects, issues such as informal and precarious employment in tourism are omitted (Mazzini, 2009; Tottino & Catalano, 2015) where workers do not have essential social benefits. These facts also help to describe the normality to which it is intended to return. The speeches of the central actors focus on the reactivation and return to the previous stage, with omissions and without problematizing that previous stage. Statements converge on a lack of critical perspective and a lack of proposals to review and modify some practices. The tourism model is out of the agendas and discourses of the main players. Beyond these narratives, it is necessary to make visible emerging approaches that offer a broader and more complex view, such as the solidarity agents who propose “other tourisms”.

### **Thinking scenarios and opportunities from the foreseeable**

Conundrums about the tourism model of production, marketing and consumption accumulate. Despite the uncertainty generated by the speed with which changes are taking place, it is necessary to think about the future of tourism and contribute to construct it in a different manner. By indicating some expected consequences of the coronavirus on tourism in Argentina, the possibilities of action in this scenario

will be analyzed. This will allow us an approach to the context and the conditions in which all the actors will have to move.

### **Forced degrowth and self-management**

Theorists of degrowth have always emphasized that degrowth processes would be either an agreed and planned decision by the majorities or a chaotic imposition due to changing natural conditions. Degrowth is forecast to be the greatest certainty that the tourism sector will have in the short and medium term. Several factors influence its sharp contraction: impoverishment of a significant part of Argentinian households and its consequent restriction of expenses, low receptivity of foreign tourists, or fear of resorting to crowded spaces.

In line with the drop in tourism, a strong impact is expected on small and medium-sized hotels, transport, gastronomy and tourism agencies. This, added to an inevitable “[domino effect](#)”, would undoubtedly imply a change in the tourism supply composition. This means in any case thousands of new unemployed. The expected closure of companies could give rise to two types of scenarios: the first, with a more concentrated supply and sustained by the same type of demand; the second, the organization of employee actors for the adoption of self-managed models that maintain their sources of work.

In this second case, the recovery of companies by their workers and the creation of worker cooperatives that provide tourism services emerges as an opportunity. This type of processes, which implies that workers take charge of the means of production and self-manage the company, could occur mainly in activities that demand a lot of labor, such as hotels or gastronomy. In the country there is a history of the recovery of companies in general, hotels, such as [Pipinas](#), [Bauen](#), [Pismanta](#) or Quijote, and restaurants, such as Alé Alé, Los chanchitos, La Casona or Lalo.

Workers’ recovery of companies from bankruptcy or closure and the consequent constitution of cooperatives could be a central strategy, not only to minimize damage, but also for a more equitable composition of the sector. This could only happen if this alternative is conceived as a viable option that is driven by the actors involved, is supported by a broad social base and accompanied by other agents of the social and solidarity sector; and that, instead of being repressed, it is legitimized by the State.

## Social distancing and sustainability

It is expected that social fear to the pandemic will continue after the period of mandatory lockdown. Planning a trip to a distant environment or getting on a plane, train or bus will last some time: it is unlikely that tourism practices will return to their previous state in the short term. Government warns that tourism with social distancing should be promoted; accordingly, the Argentina's Chamber of Tourism assumes the need to "[avoid large concentrations of tourists.](#)"

On the side of large companies such as airlines or hotel chains, health measures and protocols conceptualized as a Covid-free certification. The Ministry also proposes a program of "[Post-Covid19 good practices](#)" and stands out to be working on protocols "[so that the return of the activity is safe.](#)" The goal is to generate guarantees so that citizens can confidently restart their tourism practice as soon as possible. There are already framed ideas such as taking the temperature of air passengers or the possibility of placing acrylic dividers in the seats of the planes.

Social distancing would give space, at least for a time, to the visibility of narratives and the permeability of practices on sustainable tourism. The individual fear of contagion can promote reactionary feelings, discriminatory and individualizing practices too. But it can also give rise to an "[embodied consciousness](#)" about the interdependence between people and ecosystems that encourages other ways of traveling, knowing and resting. Social distancing antagonizes mass influx and the large-scale model, and can lead to the push for slower tourism practices. It can open up a possibility for sustainability.

## Short distances and the proximity option

Another change that is expected in the post-pandemic scenario is that tourism [will be carried out over short distances](#) during 2020 and possibly part of 2021. The actors assume this: Government promotes "[closeness](#)" and encourages [travel within the national territory](#), and the Argentina's Chamber of Tourism affirms that proximity will be "[the axis of the recovery of the activity.](#)" Proximity affects the logic of the cult of speed and hits the waterline of globalized tourism. Thus, it generates opportunities for other actors who propose the claim of stillness, or proximity tourism practices and the revaluation of local environments and cultures, such as rural, peasant or



community-based tourism. The proximity is also a possibility for a more sustainable tourism.

Proximity affects the logic of the cult of velocity and hits the plimsoll line of globalized tourism. Thus, it generates opportunities for other actors who claim slowness, or proximity tourism practices and the revaluation of local environments and cultures, such as rural, peasant or community-based tourism. The proximity is also a possibility for a more sustainable tourism. These changes can also be linked to pre-Covid consumer trends. A [study carried out by booking.com](#) last October analyzed tourism trends. According to its results, around 50% of Argentines were interested in reducing the environmental impact generated by excess tourism. And, in that regard, they would be willing to modify the destinations or means of transport used in order to avoid overcrowding and help the preservation of the environment. This study not only demonstrates the possibility of exploring this type of practices but also that its appropriation will be a space of dispute. As the tourist cake is reduced, proximity will be a strategy adopted by actors of diverse origins. Big capitals that until now had no interest in local tourism will begin to fight for this modality.

### **Time, fragility of changes and disputes to come**

In all cases, it is important to take into account the temporal dimension of the aforementioned changes. Three central issues will happen and will enable tourism activity again: at the country level, the Government will withdraw the restrictions, at the global level the WHO will give the go-ahead to travel, and the fear of contagion will diminish. Changes will be temporary, and the foreseeable course of events is that, according to the will and interests of the central actors, a progressive return to a similar model to the preceding one. This will presumably happen unless the most affected sectors (workers, small companies, solidarity or community organizations) organize and articulate to generate alternatives and influence decision-making spaces that can modify this course.

A political and meaning dispute will probably take place during this period. Discourses and proposals, in many cases antagonistic, will contrast. There will be a struggle to establish a dominant view on which model of tourism development is the most convenient for the common good. It is in this temporary space where SSE workers, actors and related sectors together will be able to maximize their efforts to



disseminate their arguments and make visible their proposals and experiences that allow the practice of a more supportive, equitable and sustainable tourism. Although assuming the unequal correlation of forces and limited time, this is precisely the main window of opportunity.

### **Setting next tourism**

To lay the reflection, critical factors are raised for the configuration of the next tourism in Argentina.

***The role of the State.*** What will be the orientation of public policies in general and tourism in particular and the correlation of forces in the decisions of the State. So far there is no intention to change the paradigm of tourism or the orientation of policies towards solidarity experiences. On the contrary, everything points to a transfer of resources that guarantees a return as quickly as possible to the previous stage.

***The role of citizenship.*** What impact the pandemic will have on the representations and major practices around tourism. Changes in consumer behavior are expected to occur, although its orientation and duration are difficult to establish. There may be checks and balances in the tension between the fear of traveling and the vindication of freedom through tourism consumption. From fear can also arise an unlearning, an awareness about the damages and risks of the model, and a questioning of that idea of freedom, which would allow greater visibility of associative and transformative tourism experiences.

***Capabilities of social actors.*** What capability will the actors from the social, popular and solidarity fields have for the articulation, inter-cooperation and construction of synergies in relation to tourism. The stable organization will be able to allow a greater coupling between responsible demand and solidarity supply. As in other crises, the newly unemployed and informal workers can be the new victims, or become strategic actors that strengthen cooperation ties for the construction of another tourism model.

***Community organization.*** Another factor links to the possibility that members of the populations in the destinations can work together to, through different forms of organizational structure, carry out or support tourism projects that respond to the interest of the community. This implies a strength in the organization of the commu-

nities and a level of social participation that enables the planning and management of community-based tourism in the territories.

Ultimately, the configuration of the next map of Argentina's tourism will be determined by who are the actors that drive and lead the transformations or, on the contrary, the continuities of the activity. The possibility of paving a way out where the general interest prevails must arise from the will, consensus and the consolidation of cooperative relations between the State, solidarity organizations and organized communities. In this scenario, social actors can spur on the vast accumulated experience in the country.

The next tourism is still a story to write; and a fragment of its narrative will depend on the capacity for adaptation, innovation and articulation between the actors who, from different parts of the geography, propose and put into practice tourism alternatives crossed by other rationalities, values and ideas. However, it is important to avoid a naive look. The correlation of forces, the ability to influence the State and the collective imagination shown by the lobbies of the sector reveals a latent risk: that the post-Covid-19 scenario could bring a more concentrated, exclusive and unsustainable tourism model. This would not be a dystopia, but a certain possibility.

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## COVID-19: NOW IS THE TIME TO TRANSFORM TOURISM

Transforming Tourism Initiative<sup>41</sup>

UNWTO World Tourism Organization  
Secretary General  
Zurab Pololikashvili

*World Tourism Day*  
September 27, 2020

Dear Mr. Secretary General,

We appreciate the farsightedness and courage of UN General Secretary António Guterres, to call this COVID-19 pandemic crisis an opportunity for transformation in tourism by launching the Policy Brief on **“COVID-19 and Transforming Tourism”**.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with its vision to transform our world to a just, equal and inclusive one, continues to serve as a guiding set of principles as we navigate through the upheavals caused by the climate crisis and the catastrophe of growing social and economic inequalities that are being deepened and accentuated by the current COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences have hit the tourism industry and governments at a time, when the resistance to the destructive growth of tourism has been getting louder. In recent years, local inhabitants in many communities have protested against over-tourism. Workers movements and organizations of informal workers have been continuously demanding better and decent working conditions, and millions of young people are calling for immediate climate action. Obviously, the promises of tourism to be a key contributor to sustainable development have not been fulfilled. The crisis now serves as a burning lens and shows that the

41 [Transforming Tourism Initiative](#) (TTI) is a platform that was created in 2017 for NGOs, tourism professionals, and academics.

current tourism model is, also in economic terms, neither resilient nor sustainable. It is far away from making a key contribution to the future we all need and want.

**Transforming tourism** is the demand of the hour. It is more than fixing the old, unsustainable growth-based tourism model. It requires a systematic approach to analyse, understand, and address the consequences that unsustainable tourism practices have on people and our planet.

As the pandemic is amplifying the exposure of the weakest in tourism we want to reinforce the demands that we published in our [Berlin Declaration on Transforming Tourism, 2017](#). Until today more than 70 institutions from civil society, academia and people movements have signed it together with more than 500 individuals from all continents across the globe.

Addressing the challenges of tourism in the context of COVID 19 means:

- Upholding the “leave no one behind”-principle in recovery plans: Governments are requested to provide urgent and efficient support to the most vulnerable groups in the tourism sector, who are the workers in the formal and informal economy. Among them are migrant workers and women, who face particular discriminations and vulnerabilities.
- Ensure that mistakes from the past are not repeated now that domestic and rural tourism are growing more intensively. Encourage destinations, tourism planners and companies to develop concepts to define local carrying capacities in a participatory way, in order to avoid a repetition of the over-tourism crisis. On the contrary, support tourism strategies that contribute to inclusive economic and social development.
- The recession is likely to lead to new investments in tourism. Guarantees in contracts and planning permissions should ensure that social and environmental sustainability and disaster preparedness are at the core of any new investments and that they do not harm traditional land use patterns.
- Support destinations to implement truly resilient tourism models that serve people in host communities and destinations. Thousands of communities active in tourism have proved, even in a deep crisis such as COVID-19, that

their model is more resilient to external shocks and so better equipped for a world characterized by more and more uncertainties. Motivate your members' countries not to opt for a debt-induced tourism model, because it increases the dependency of destinations instead of contributing to their resilience.

Whilst the most urgent measures to fight the social and economic impacts of COVID 19 are the highest priority, we need also to initiate long-term measures to transform tourism. These include:

- Develop mechanisms that measure the effects of tourism on people and the planet including the ecological and social costs of tourism and allowing for fair and just pricing. Only tourism that contributes to the wellbeing of people and protects the environment is a viable development option.
- Ensure that precariousness and segmentation of labour in tourism is addressed by adopting and fully adhering to the ILO Decent Work Principles. These include respect for fundamental labour rights, such as freedom to organize and the eradication of all forms of labour discrimination, forced labour, and child labour.
- Remind all tourism stakeholders from both the public and private sectors that tourism should facilitate an economic and social ecosystem that allows diverse and complementary sets of livelihoods in communities and destinations to co-exist and thus to generate local well-being, cooperation and fair trade.
- Ensure that tourism makes honest and ambitious efforts to combat climate change by reducing its absolute emissions and its use of fossil fuels, globally, nationally and locally e.g. by avoiding non-essential flights; structurally reducing plastic use; adopting and contributing to responsible waste management practices; and ensuring true-cost pricing of fossil fuels.
- Ensure that tourism protects natural landscapes and biodiversity. Develop strategies and practices for sustainable development, which are rooted in a

region and which respect its natural and cultural resources as well as its carrying capacities.

The demand to transform tourism, which General Secretary António Guterres referred to in his speech and the policy brief on “COVID-19 and Transforming Tourism”, has to be mainstreamed in all UNWTO policies and programmes. Achieving our joint vision of the 2030 Agenda and overcoming the incomparable global crisis that COVID-19 causes need the support of every stakeholder. Community groups, civil society organizations, people’s movement, academic institution, tourism planners, tourism practitioners as well as tourism policy makers must engage in the tourism decision-making process as equals.

We are concerned that the lack of inclusiveness in the institutional processes of the UNWTO is a barrier for this and a severe burden for the upcoming process to truly transform tourism. Only inclusive institutions will be able to navigate us all through the crisis and provide the essential vision and principles to enable us to transform tourism together.

In this regard, we urge the UNWTO to open its doors for representatives of people’s movements and members of the informal sector as well as independent NGOs and academic institutions that decide not to become affiliate members of UNWTO. We are ready to contribute to this and are looking forward to discuss strategies to democratize tourism development at the global level with you.

We are expectant for your timely commitment and support to transform tourism. We look forward to your response to our sincere recommendations.

Sincerely yours,

Antje Monshausen on behalf of the signatories,

Alba Sud, España

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Brot für die Welt – Protestant Development Service, Alemania

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Fresh Eyes – People to people travel, Reino Unido  
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#TourismPostCOVID19  
Lockdown touristification

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