

THE WORLD WITHOUT TOURISM - THE IMPACT OF THE INDUSTRY'S SHUT DOWN IS DRAMATIC



To many it seems superficial that a virus, no matter how deadly, is enough to completely end leisure travel; but the reality is that the coronavirus pandemic has revealed how much a change of scene is needed, to go somewhere else every now and then.

Is it possible for world growth to revive without tourism? This is the question that those responsible for the world economy rack their brains for today. **It is precisely the pandemic what has demonstrated the importance of tourism;** and not just in countries with well-defined tourism reliance, such as Spain, Italy or Austria, where this industry accounts for one-sixth of GDP and employment. Tourism is also decisive for the entire global economy because it is an industry that sets other industries in motion.

Without tourism, not only do the hotel, restaurant and, in general, all industries related to hotel activities stop, but also the aviation industry disappears completely, the automobile industry is reduced by half, the shipyards specialized in cruise ships are ruined, the building is severely affected. The collapse also affects the steel industry, concrete, electronics...

Four years ago, when Italian journalist Marco d'Eramo wrote 'Il Selfie del Mondo' [The World in a Selfie: An Inquiry into the Tourist Age], experts refused to believe that tourism is the most important industry of the century. But one year of the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us how important and serious tourism is; an industry that is usually treated with such disdain.

Businessmen tend to underestimate this industry because people confuse tourism with tourists, and it is difficult to take tourists seriously: they seem funny to us, literally people out of place. They always spark citizen outrage due to the damage that tourism causes, like blaming workers for the poisoning caused by industry. This alone should make us consider the underlying paradox that we are all tourists who despise tourists!

This paradox explains this unresolved relationship with the industry. It also shows how superficial are those who believe that a virus, no matter how deadly, is enough to end this invention of modernity, built for a century and a half, and that came into prominence after World War II.

The fact is that two revolutions took place to create tourism. One was technological: the revolution of transport and communications, which made fast and cheap travel possible. The other was social and it generated travelers. This social revolution did not fall from the sky, but was the fruit of very hard and endless struggles through which the progressive conquest of paid leisure was achieved. For human beings to become tourists, it is not enough to have free time (the unemployed have all the time in the world, for example).

Before Bismarck in Germany, the New Deal in the United States, or the Popular Front in France, in human history a large part of the population had never enjoyed income during periods of inactivity. In other words, we had never taken a paid leave or pension before that. At least 95% of the tourists

in recent years were on paid vacations or had some form of pension or retirement savings. To get rid of the fruit of these two revolutions, the technological and the social ones, a different revolution would be needed.

Those two major events not only transformed our lives, but also our world views. They have made the ability to travel the cornerstone of our idea of freedom. The pandemic has revealed how much we need a change of scene, to be able to go somewhere else every now and then (no matter where). The will to travel is a way to reclaim freedom.

In the West, however, before the pandemic, no one had realized that the need to travel and to experience new horizons was so inherently political. Only the repeated and prolonged confinement during the second coronavirus wave made us experience in our own skin that the impossibility of traveling was like a prison. For the first time, we had to put ourselves in the shoes of the East Germans, and as it turns out, preventing citizens from traveling means depriving them from the general concept of freedom.

The first paradox (that we're all tourists who despise other tourists), proposes a second one: tourism is an indispensable element of our freedom, but it is also a twofold polluting industry. First, because as an industry that keeps other industries in motion, tourism is responsible for all the pollution that these industries (aviation, automobile, construction, naval, steel ...) produce. And second, because as a social industry, it produces human pollution (emptying of urban centers, Disneyfication, degradation of ecosystems). It is a paradox that leads to only one conclusion: our conception of freedom is an idea destined to consume the world. It is inevitable that a society based on consumption, which pushes us all to be consumers, must ultimately lead to extending this activity across the globe; that is, to consume the planet.

That is why it's so difficult to do without tourism and at the same time live with it. The drive to reactivate the economy as if nothing had happened is very strong: in 2019, there were no less than 69 million flights in the entire world. We certainly underestimate our capacity to forget, which ends in that sorrowful illusion that 'nothing will be as before'.

In 1918, they were convinced that the war that had just ended would be "the last war to put an end to all wars". After the financial crisis of 2008, many renowned economists said that capitalism would never be the same again. Therefore, there is room to doubt such an outcome for this pandemic, mostly because the future diversity does not look so promising.

As much as humanity attempts to start over from the beginning, it will not be easy to do it as if nothing had happened; even less so the longer the state of emergency lasts in Spain: the longer the shutdown lasts, more companies will go bankrupt, more supply chains will be interrupted, more workers will have been recycled in other sectors. Above all, investor confidence will suffer and it will be more difficult to convince them to invest capital in an industry that has been overpowered by a virus.

Truth is, nobody knows which is better: to end the lockdowns and confinement as soon as possible and start polluting again right away, or to continue being depressed and imprisoned a little longer but giving the planet a moment of relief and much-needed respite.

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