

THE IMPACT OF LEISURE AND TOURISM ON PUBLIC HEALTH IN PANDEMIC TIMES

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***Abstract:** Before the twenty-first century, tourism was one of the world's fastest-growing sectors. When the planet was hit by COVID-19, it became clear how tourism is dependent on the development of intangible assets and vulnerable to unplanned incidents such as pandemics. Many tourists' choice of travel destination is now influenced by the health and illness situation of the target countries, as well as the costs of future prevention. COVID-19 has brought plenty of new strains, including sickness, bereavement, alienation, unemployment, and overwork, it has also culminated in a dramatic change in our leisure time lifestyle. People are extremely vulnerable to many of the triggers of poor mental health brought about by the pandemic. Domestic abuse and disharmony, damaging workplace conditions, excessive demands to serve as caregivers for other family members, and fewer ways to ease tension by briefly escaping from domestic social dynamics all lead to poor mental health. Leisure has been an important part of the COVID-19 debate and experience. Most governments spend less on recreational activities that include public benefits of wellbeing than they do on hospital services that rely on biomedical therapies. Many leisure and healthcare professionals and scholars are becoming increasingly mindful of the intersections between leisure, fitness, and wellness. Natural environment and recreation have a high healthcare appeal as a way to boost fitness and wellbeing. Tourism and leisure are now inextricably linked to the structure of modern human societies and economies. The pandemic provided the opportunity to rediscover society as a venue for leisure outdoor activities and emphasized the importance of public place. Communication is crucial to reinstate tourist trust and attract tourists back to impacted destinations in the shortest of time because the devastation caused by the virus is spread fast, risking lives (mental) health and economy.*

***Keywords:** leisure, tourism, health, mental health, COVID-19, pandemic*

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic is not only a public health issue, but it has already affected people's everyday lives all over the world. One of the first steps taken in several countries in the wake of the first COVID-19 event was the closure of neighbourhood fitness centres, pools, and cultural

centres. Though COVID-19 has added a slew of new pressures to our lives, such as illness, bereavement, isolation, loss of employment, and overwork, it has also resulted in a significant shift in our leisure time habits. And, just like the pandemic's wider experience, leisure life has become a deeply divided experience formed by layers of power and also a little pure chance. In the middle of the increasing distress induced by COVID-19 lockdowns, being able to comfortably leave the building can help relieve mental and physical health problems.

In reaction to the pandemic's negative effect on the recreation sector, governments around the world have (or have not) done much to promote people's leisure. Some people chose indoor leisure activities like online shopping, viewing movies online, engaging in personality improvement activities, and training at home with online coaching. The growth and formation of e-commerce and streaming video services have benefited from everyone going out less. Restaurant and hotel businesses collaborated with food delivery companies, and indoor sports and wellness equipment became in high demand when several public fitness centres were forced to close, forcing residents to workout at home. Furthermore, sales of laptops, desks and chairs, and other things required for home office work have improved.

Tourism, as an open framework, is marked by a high degree of environmental networking. The frequent encounters with the different aspects of the outer world have an impact not just on the tourism system but also on the climate. The world can be broken down into scientific, sociocultural, political, fiscal, and ecological aspects. Tourism, and all of its elements, is highly sensitive to shifts in all aspects of the ecosystem due to the various interrelationships. A multitude of external factors may also have a major effect on traveller versatility. These external considerations can be divided into two categories: the natural offer of the destination and the possible possibility of crises depending on the various environmental aspects.

The uncertainty about COVID-19 caused considerable confusion and panic in many sectors. The tourism industry has seen dramatic declines in sales and is one of the most negatively impacted economic sectors by the pandemic. The shock has an effect on both the demand and supply sides, as people cannot travel freely. Leisure activities, particularly those in which we engage individually or in small groups, are a simple choice for governments aiming to open up small business sectors. This is particularly true for areas that largely depend on tourism-related revenue.

Table 1: Coronavirus – confirmed cases - situation by WHO Region on March, 25 2021 (WHO 2021)

WHO Region	Confirmed cases
Americas	4.589.001
Europe	43.099.204
South-East Asia	14.407.130
Eastern Mediterranean	7.280.410
Africa	3.020.998
Western Pacific	1.818.355
Total	104.215.843

THE INFLUENCE OF PANDEMICS ON TOURISM

Tourism sector experienced massive changes in tourist demand and overall growth of global tourism as a result of the social changes brought about technological and economic advances (especially in the transportation system), improved geopolitical stability and the opening of several national borders.

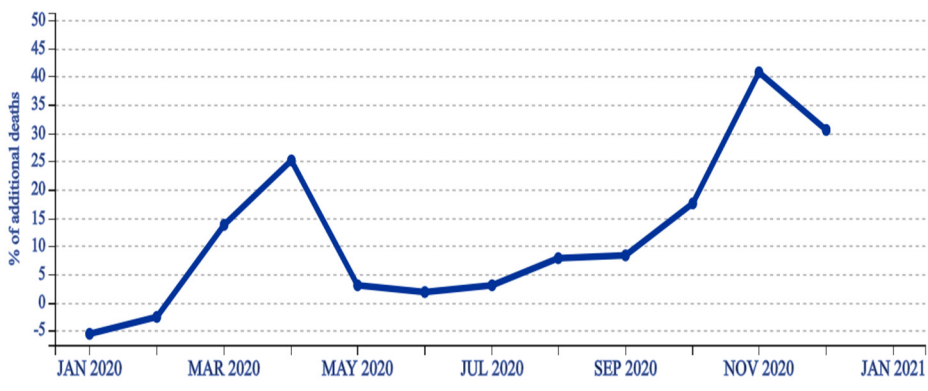
Individual travel motifs of future travellers are one of the deciding factors in the course of the travel decision. However, owing to the almost infinite number of possible travel destinations in modern tourism, prospective travellers often select a destination based on their sense of feeling comfortable and happy at the desired destination.

The transmission of pandemics is the most important risk factor of a medical disaster. Viruses that can spread with extreme velocity noticeably interfere with the international tourism infrastructure. Tourism, on the one hand, encourages the dissemination of epidemics around the world due to high mobility; on the other hand, the outbreak of an illness affects tourism. Practically no other industry is as reliant on the growth of intangible assets as the tourism industry. Its expenditures are determined by provision, short or long-term planning. This fact proves how the tourism industry is susceptible to sudden, unplanned incidents and disasters, which can totally destroy these intangible assets.

Obviously, if the journey is free of disease, violence, and disasters, travelling is the most enjoyable way to encounter people and visit new cities. Fortunately, with the right information, most threats can be reduced and holidays can be packed with memorable encounters. However, epidemics and pandemics as two of the most terrifying catastrophes for tourists and tourism industry can bring travelling to a halt. Of course, in such situations avoiding the illness can be extremely difficult. Moreover, it's not just the travellers, but also the people they meet along the way, that are at risk. So, travellers can contribute significantly to the spread of epidemics and pandemics across regions and countries.

Uğur and Akbıyık (2020) describe the SARS epidemic in 2003 as a good starting point in illuminating how this happens. As SARS was also caused by a coronavirus, it is epidemiologically similar. It also began in South Asia and since it was the first outbreak in the era of globalization and the Internet, comparable activity is to be expected today. Between November 2002 and June 2003, roughly 8000 people in more than 30 countries were affected by the SARS virus, almost two-thirds of whom were in the People's Republic of China. In Taiwan, Singapore, and Canada, there were even more diseases and fatalities. Given the low total number of infected people, the effects of SARS on work and productivity were minimal. The indirect effects, on the other hand, were rather noticeable. The WHO gave travel alerts to a number of Asian and North American regions in order to slow the transmission of the disease. As a result of SARS, travellers avoided the Southeast Asia area for a while in order to prevent contamination (ibid.).

Figure 1: Monthly excess mortality - % of additional deaths compared with average monthly deaths in 2016-2019 in European Union in year 2020 (Eurostat 2021)



Aside from the human tragedy, larger-scale epidemics and pandemics have also economic consequences. As a result, the workers are incapacitated, which means that the job market is affected as well. Uğur and Akbıyık (2020) state that additional consequences may also stem from behaviour changes of consumers; e.g. customers stop purchasing, tourists avoid areas that tend to be dangerous to avoid contamination.

It could be claimed that global travel traffic has come to a halt as a result of the corona crisis. Many countries exclude foreigners from entering their countries and seal their borders. These reports point to the tourism industry's abrupt standstill. While it is impossible to determine when global emergencies such as epidemics, pandemics, natural disasters, and terrorism will arise, planning for them is difficult and expensive. Attracting visitors from various places, showcasing different destinations, posing influencers as brand faces, and growing location credibility may be the tourism sector new strategy, but during world disasters, however, both of these plans lose their sense and efficacy.

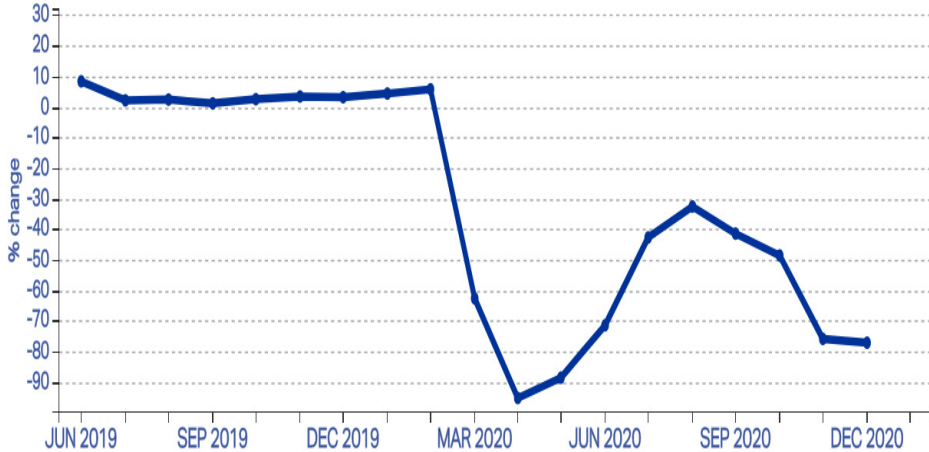
The scale of the economic effects of the COVID-19 epidemic cannot be properly estimated since the outbreak's course and length are still uncertain. Even in its current condition, however, economic deterioration is much more significant than during the SARS epidemic so COVID-19's indirect impacts are likely to be much greater than those of SARS. To fight the disease, countries have taken dramatic steps. The affected areas were automatically isolated from the rest of the country or quarantined. Furthermore, any form socialising is avoided. Many public and private institutions, including colleges, restaurants, hotels, and conference centres, have been forced to close for the time being.

Since the epidemic is quickly spreading outside of China, the economic effects would be felt not only by a reduction in Chinese demand, but also directly in the countries impacted. According to the OECD's negative scenario, global GDP growth will fall by 1.5 percent in 2020, and global trade volume will fall by 3.75 percent. Other forecasts have far more drastic results (ibid.).

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Figure 2: Nights spent in tourist accommodation in EU - % change compared with same period of previous year (Eurostat 2021)



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LEISURE AND HEALTH

Although the association between leisure and health has long been part of leisure discourses and science, there is an agreed necessity for leisure scholars and practitioners to step beyond simplistic explanations of the general benefits of leisure activity to more robust understandings that provide internationally recognised definitions of health.

Young et al. (2020) describe that this re-evaluation is linked to contemporary public health standards, which offer a wider viewpoint on health than merely seeing health as the absence of illness. According to these views, 'health' is a holistic term that requires an understanding of the physical, emotional, and social health dimensions of leisure activities that are being undertaken in order to promote health. A variety of recreational undertakings, such as gym, physical education, sport, creative arts, and various hobbies, can be used as an opportunity across numerous aspects of

wellbeing at this convergence of leisure and health sectors. Health professions that are more mindful of the social complexities of fitness and nutrition are on the outside of the dominant healthcare system and are often limited to focus on disease and injury avoidance or mitigation. This contrasts sharply with wider understandings of fitness as a resource thriving by leisure, and longevity and nutrition as those in the leisure industry misunderstand. The World Health Organization describes health as ‘a condition of full physical, emotional, and social well-being, rather than simply the absence of sickness or disability’ (Callahan 1973: 77-87) and as a ‘resource for everyday life, not the objective of living. Health is a positive concept emphasizing social and personal resources, as well as physical capacities. According to the 1st International Conference on Health Promotion, Ottawa, 1986 health promotion doesn’t include just the responsibility of the health sector, but goes beyond healthy life-styles to well-being’ (WHO 2021).

Even though national government structures and multinational institutions such as the WHO are talking about non-biomedical understandings of health, including fitness, quality of life, social and leisure frameworks of understanding ‘health,’ the fact is that the prevalent understanding of health is based on the notion of illness and disability.

LEISURE AND CULTURE DURING COVID-19

De la Barre (2020: 307) suggests that public, private, and non-profit sector responses for supporting leisure during the pandemic were at odds. When things came to a halt and everyone began to search for leisure options, it was the private and non-profit sectors that provided solutions and did so mostly free of charge. The public sector was relatively quiet, offering little support for leisure activities. Therefore, the motivation should be better exploited, the roles these sectors have played up to now should be re-evaluated and reinvented, including how they engage and collaborate with one another (ibid.).

Moreover, leisure has also been investigated as a means of tackling social isolation, which was characterized long before the pandemic as one of the most urgent social problems of our time, ironically in an era when engaging with others seems so straightforward. As a result, leisure is being evaluated in terms of how it is positioned as a means of helping people during and after a pandemic. These analyses are expanding our view of leisure's function in connecting people to themselves or others and acting as a social alienation remedy. In addition, given the insight of what life would

be like without arts and cultural festivals and practices, there has been a rekindled debate about the importance of the arts and culture. These debates cover how to help the arts and cultural sectors through the pandemic, including finance, but also studies that will have a long-term effect on reducing the long-standing precarity of the arts and cultural sectors. Furthermore, the pandemic gave us the opportunity to look back and rediscover society as a venue for leisure outdoor activities. Therefore, public space designers have played a vital part in fostering the need for more space to move freely. These policies included closing roads in urban areas so that residents could get outside and follow the physical distancing rules, modifying local bylaws so that restaurants could use the land in front of their stores and serve more people who could eat outside on patios, and opening up more parks and green spaces. Many people became aware of what important role public space, which is generally open and accessible to all people, plays in their everyday life (ibid.).

LEISURE TOURISM AND MENTAL HEALTH

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021 caused significant social, economic, and environmental shifts. Because of worries over family welfare, lack of livelihood, and lockdowns, there is widespread decline in mental health.

Buckley and Westway (2020) define leisure tourism as a non-essential pursuit that improves one's well-being. Poor mental health and well-being place enormous social and economic burdens on human civilisations around the world. Prior to the 2019/20 COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, these costs contributed to 10% of global GNP. They are now rising as a result of COVID-19 lockout, exclusion, and quarantine steps. Tourism will help to minimize these costs by improving people's well-being. This creates economic benefit in the healthcare sector in addition to the tourism sector. Nature, in fact, offers a substantial and diverse range of mental health benefits. This importance of health services is created by outdoor nature and adventure tourism and recreation.

Nature and adventure have a high health-care appeal. Tourism and leisure are now deeply ingrained in the fabric of contemporary human cultures and economies. If individuals did not partake in these practices as self-funded disposable recreation, the costs of inadequate mental wellbeing will rise by an estimated 7.5 percent (Buckley and Westway 2020). These extra expenses – such as treatments, caregivers, reduced job efficiency, increased antisocial activity, both public and domestic – are now being

borne as part of the social and economic costs of COVID-19 lockdowns. Domestic abuse has also escalated as a result of COVID-19 family confinement.

Undoubtedly, tourism can be therapeutic. Some commercial outdoor tourism activities can support some customers' mental health. These advantages have preventative elements, such as retaining the mental health of people who haven't exhibited any psychiatric signs of poor mental health. National healthcare programs offer preventative elements that are provided by the government, as well as rehabilitation mechanisms that are partially funded by health insurance. Tourism has social and economic benefits for communities and economy and can be well-defined and calculated. Greater human well-being, job efficiency, and social behaviours, as well as decreased costs of mental health services and caregivers pose a great value for society as a whole.

EFFORTS TAKEN BY COUNTRIES IN RESPONSE TO THE TOURISM CRISIS

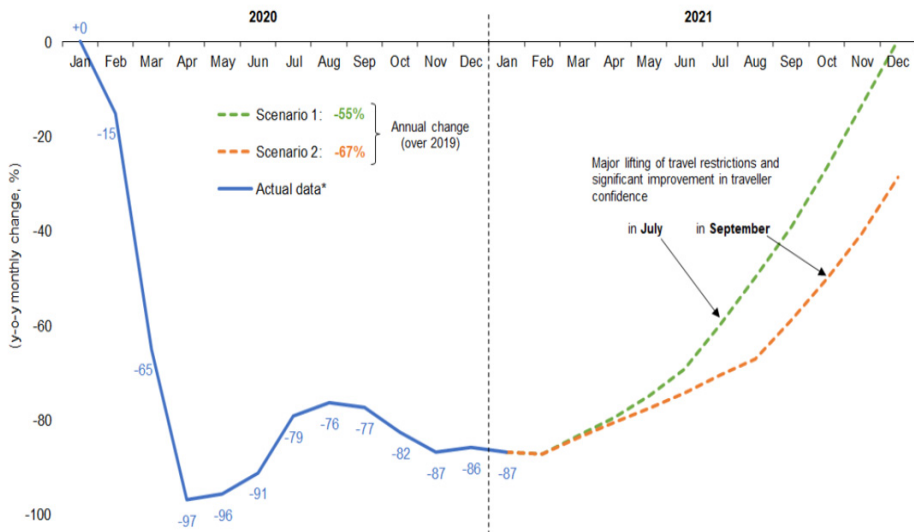
Dealing with emergencies is not unusual for tourism sector, since virtually any tourism organization is confronted with exceptional incidents over time, but the emergence of tourist crises often results in a lack of safety effects. As a result, it has the potential to have a huge effect on both individual travel decisions and overall travel conduct. The destination representation is important in a tourist's decision-making process when selecting a destination. The picture of a destination's attractions is incredibly significant, because it increases tourism. But then again, the tourism sector is vulnerable to emergencies and disasters, so when a destination's reputation is harmed by a crisis or accident, it normally takes a long time to recover. Furthermore, the healing process after a catastrophe or tragedy is crucial for the ongoing development of a tourist destination that has been impacted. The transformation of a negative image into a positive image necessitates urgent countermeasures as well as time-consuming efforts on the part of the government, affiliated groups, and the general public. It is critical to place a crisis-affected or disaster-affected destination with accurate and up-to-date statistics, so tourists' perceptions of the destination's safety would significantly influence their visit intentions.

WHO proposes rehabilitation activities, which should be launched as soon as possible, in order to reduce the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic that they recognize as a public health issue with far-reaching

implications for people's lives, economies, and cultures (Chua et al. 2020). They call for disaster management which is crucial for the long-term growth of tourism in severely impacted regions. WHO posits three basic steps of crisis management: (1) planning prior to a crisis, (2) reaction to a crisis as it happens, and (3) rehabilitation after the crisis has ended. Communication is seen as vital in order to restore tourist trust and draw visitors back to the affected destinations. Furthermore, time is essential because the destruction caused by epidemic will escalate quickly, threatening lives and health. As a result, one of the most critical tactics for coping with the COVID-19 pandemic is to react rapidly and in a timely manner in order to mitigate the harm (ibid.).

Chua et al. (2020) on the other hand say that another downside of these crises is that it takes time for travellers to recover their former mobility after the crisis has ended. For a period of time, people are influenced by an atmosphere of fear, apprehension, and vulnerability, and they become used to keeping still and local. This pattern increases the time for the tourist sector to rebound. The travel industry still faces challenges. Many businesses overcame the difficulties of digitization and thrived in a changing world. However, the severity of COVID-19's effects is not equal to recent crises.

Figure 3: International Tourist Arrivals in 2020 and Scenarios for 2021 y-o-y monthly change, % (UNWTO 2021)



CONCLUSION

How can tourism change radically in the post-COVID-19 era? Although the pandemic will reshuffle long-held determinants of tourism as we know it, a vital change in tourists' psychology is likely to occur: While the pandemic will inevitably diminish and travel barriers will be removed, some tourists' psyches will likely settle on a new equilibrium. Although the full effect on the tourist psyche cannot be expected at this point, the potential consequences for tourism will be seismic in magnitude. Understanding the altered psychological make-up of visitors would be a critical success driver for both tourism researchers and companies during and after the COVID-19 period.

According to Kock et al. (2020) these processes, especially the behavioural immune system, have been shaped over thousands of years in our ancestors' history. When enabled, they are likely to circumvent traditionally learned and socially developed paradigms in our daily lives. The latest pandemic is proof of this, and recognizing its implications for tourism science without an evolutionary lens provides an imperfect image at best.

Internal procedures have also had a detrimental impact on tourism-related practices. The latest transmission of the virus, with or without state quarantine measures, has resulted in a notable drop in so-called "social consumption." Restaurant tours, domestic tourism, cultural festivals, and trade fairs are also prohibited. Several major activities have either been delayed or cancelled in a number of countries. Because of the large number of cancellations, the aviation industry has cut "the flight plans by almost half" (Uğur and Akbıyık 2020).

Flexibility and agility are two important characteristics of the tourism industry. The need for mobility, consumption, and independence is likely to remain strong in the future, but it will be shaped by the local situation. Along with attempts to normalize, the tourism industry must provide visitors with trust. Travel reimbursement, refund, and schedule adjustment plans must be revised so that enterprises can have maximum continuity and versatility.

Without a doubt, major improvements in both work and leisure will arise from the COVID-19 situation. For instance, the application of four-day working week, the support of working from home, the implementation of basic income at national or local levels. There are developments in the understanding of arts and artists, as well as the treatment of seasonal tourism and hospitality workers.

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