

TOURISM REVIVAL – NEW HORIZONS AFTER THE PANDEMIA

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Abstract

The author of this paper tries to provide a short glimpse on the negative consequences of the Covid – 19 pandemia that have affected different parts of tourism industry in 2020 and the first half of 2021. The research discussion focuses on the general activities taken on public and private field against the disastrous effects of this crisis throughout the whole tourism sector. Preferences for travel of European citizens are also revealed in the context of the still ongoing pandemia. On the other hand the creative anti – Covid practices of the private sector are discussed through several practical examples. At the end of the discussion the author suggests certain guidelines for a successful tourism development after the overcome of the Covid crisis.

Keywords: tourism industry, pandemia, safe travels protocol, travellers, public and private measures, customer experience

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1. Introduction and context of the study

The world economy has suffered a lot in 2020. There is hardly an economic sector that has not been affected by the pandemia so far on a global level. The situation with world tourism business seems to be explicitly dramatic. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2020) the travel and tourism sector accounted for 10,3% of global GDP and 330 million job positions in 2019. Along with the related industries the tourism sector actually outreached 18% of the global GDP for the same year. The sector has witnessed a relatively high economic growth over the last decade due to the rising of personal disposable income, the active development of low-cost carriers, the ease of travel through internet – based services and the relaxation of visa regulations. In comparison the recapitulation for 2020 was about 1,2 – 1,5 trillion USD losses in the whole tourism sector, exposing almost 200 million job positions at risk. The cruise industry has been expected to be in the worst possible condition – by losing 150 billion USD for 2020 (Tourism Statistics Data, 2020). In the meantime some of the most popular tourist destinations like Italy, Spain and France have witnessed unprecedented declines in international visitor numbers of between 60% to 80% levels reminding the years of the World War II in the 20th century. On the other hand the air transport reached almost 90% slump only for the first half of 2020 (World Economic Forum, 2020).

Considering the still ongoing Covid – 19 situation the **goal** of this paper is to outline new opportunities for the world tourism business to overcome the current negative effects from pandemia and to continue its further development after the end of this period.

2. Literature review on tourism in a state of crisis

There are many research studies focusing on different types of crises that have affected tourism industry in different parts of the world. Some of those crises have specific duration and occur in an identifiable time and space, although their impacts may last longer in time (Ren, 2000). The response and readiness of tourism industry to react to certain crises are reflected in a substantial scientific literature (Hall, Timothy and Duval 2004; Ritchie, 2004, 2008, 2009; Laws,

Prideaux and Chon, 2007). Significant research interest is also given for issues and implications in the field of crisis and risk management (Anderson, 2006), forecasting (Prideaux, Laws and Faulkner, 2003; Lean and Smyth, 2009), impact estimation (Dwyer, Forsyth, Spurr and Van Ho, 2006), impact indicators (Sausmarez, 2007), recovery strategies of tourist companies and destinations (Scott, Laws and Prideaux, 2007), security, health and safety of tourists (Hall, Timothy and Duval, 2004) and others.

The notion of a crisis in tourism can be revealed in the context of the difficulties that tourists face in travelling or even with respect to the problems facing businesses. The term crisis is even more widely used in conjunction with the effects of some unfavourable event on tourism within the destination of visit in particular sectors like aviation or on a global scale like the current Covid – 19 pandemia. There is a lot of academic literature dedicated on the crisis at a global scale with respect to the financial system, economy, energy, the environment, food, health, population, demographic and water supply problems, considering their imminent interdependence (Crotty, 2009). Natural disasters and anthropogenic environmental problems are given special attention, like the Southeast Asian smoke haze, earthquakes, volcanoes, cyclones, hurricanes, bushfires and others.

Despite the above stated research areas, the Covid – 19 crisis has led to an unprecedented global and wholistic impact in every field of social and economic life. There is not any research so far devoted to such an apocalyptic situation before the appearance of Covid – 19. No matter the disastrous effects and the gloomy future, there is an optimistic vision for tourism not only to survive as an industry but also to overcome the current pandemia.

2. Tourism industry – Anti covid – 19 “Survival kit”

In course of the complicated 2020, world tourism industry has been exposed to an unprecedented shock which led to the economic demise of many tourist companies and related businesses. In this situation it has become evident that governments along with other international and domestic stakeholders needed to join and coordinate their efforts for the saviour of tourism. For that reason the general measures from the anti Covid – 19 “survival kit” could be mutually regarded into the types of *administrative* (governmental) and *private* (business) areas.

Most of the national governments foresee the recovery of tourism business in their destinations to start up from local (domestic) to regional and lastly to intercontinental levels. It is strongly believed that domestic tourism would drive the recovery journey. In most destinations this belief has already produced positive results long before the end of 2020.

On 27 th May 2020 the World Travel and Tourism Council launched the system of “Safe Travels” Global Protocols and Stamp for the New Normal (WTTC, 2020). This document was purposely created in terms of an indicative act for tourism companies and related businesses in the fields of hospitality; tour operators; aviation; airports; attractions; convention centers; meetings and events; adventure tourism; short term rental; car rental; insurance; outdoor shopping; mental, health and well – being. According to the explanatory statements in this document the stamp has been envisaged to certify the above stated range of businesses helping potential travellers to “recognize establishments around the world, which have adopted standardized health and hygiene protocols” (WTTC, 2020). For that purpose “the protocols align the private sector behind common standards to ensure safety of its workforce and travellers as the sector shifts to a new normal” (WTTC, 2020). The “Safe Travels” protocols have been early adopted on a national level by Turkey, Egypt, Portugal and local centers like Seville and Cancun. Concerning the system of “Safe Travels” and the proximity of their countries some national governments have decided to revive their tourism business on mutual basis by putting in place protocols for opening up specific travel channels – so

called “safe zones” or “travel bubbles”. Establishing a safe zone or a travel bubble are based on bilateral or multilateral agreements between countries having similar recovery trajectories from Covid – 19. In this relation the Baltic states have allowed free travels of passengers between them and at the same time they have decided to impose quarantine restrictions to travellers outside the bubble. A specific travel bubble has been also created between India, Nepal, Bhutan and Shri Lanka for adventure tourism – so called the “Spiritual circuit”. On the other side of the world New Zealand and Australia have organized the “Trans – Tasman Covid Safe Travel Zone”.

According to a conducted research from the European Travel Commission (Monitoring...,2020) the European tourist demand structure has relatively changed from the beginning of the Covid – 19 crisis. The figures have revealed that for the first 6 months in 2021 the most preferred types of trips are expected to have the following shares in the respondents’ preferences: sea, sun & beach - 23,3%; city breaks - 19,2 %; nature and outdoors – 15,6%; culture and heritage – 14,7%; wellness and relaxation - 8,5%; culinary, food and wine – 4%; touring and road trip – 3,7%; ski and trip in the mountains – 3,3%. The report also states that two out of three respondents will continue to rely on digital sources when planning their next trip. The share of trips by an own car is expected to increase to more than 35% approaching the share of air transport (49,3%). Health and safety measures (21%) are regarded as the most important travel qualities followed in rank by peace of mind and relaxation (14%) and affordability (13%). At the same time the air travel is considered as the least safe part of the trip. The most resilient people who have declared readiness to change their travel (entirely or partially) are those between 35 and 44 years of age.

Contemporary global conditions of extreme market uncertainty and strong economic fluctuations are forcing travel companies, especially in the most affected sectors (passenger transport and cruises) to seek innovative solutions to save their businesses and secure their future sustainable development. Customer experience with the tourist brand is at the heart of these marketing innovation breakthroughs. There are many examples so far that witness the already going process of divergent transformations of tourist companies in this direction (Dyankov, 2020).

In October 2020, the Australian airline Qantas offered a seven-hour flight of Boeing 787 program from Sydney, which passed as a low-altitude cruise over the Great Barrier Reef and the Urulu area before landing again in Sydney (Dyankov, 2020). Due to capacity constraints below 50% (without selling seats at the aisle for visibility reasons), all available 134 seats on board of the plane have been purchased in less than 10 minutes. Ticket prices for the first flight have ranged from \$ 575 to \$ 2,700 each. In this regard Qantas was trying to turn the defect into an effect by relying on the fact that the lack of flying of their regular customers in a state of pandemic emergency has led to a more essential need for primary satisfaction of passengers’ needs than simply arranging them visitations of tourist destinations. The realized trips with Qantas under this atypical program emphasize the exceptional interaction of their passengers onboard with the brand of the airline. Similar actions have been taken by Singapore Airlines by planning three-hour flights over the country and the region from and backward to one of the most modern airports in the world - Changi. The flights of the mentioned airlines have been boldly stated to set up the beginning of a new product category with the original name "Flights to Nowhere".

In July and August 2020, Eva Air from Taiwan also exploited the ability to manage customer experience with its company brand by launching special Hello Kitty "flights to nowhere", some of which remained on the ground during the "experience" while passengers were receiving high quality restaurant food and entertainment services on board in lending regime.

From November 2020 the country of Singapore has started to offer its citizens a cruise "Journey to Nowhere", as the vessels are scheduled not to visit any ports, but to sail in the waters around the state. The trips are planned to be operated by local cruise companies Genting Cruise Lines and Royal Caribbean International, and the Cruise Safe program at first has been only available to Singaporean citizens. In this way synergistic development of customer experience is

expected both with the company brands of the respective cruise lines along with the national brand of the tourist destination Singapore.

Significant technological changes on health and safety issues are expected very soon to take place in the airline industry due to the fact that more than 60% of perceived travelers' threats and risks are related to the transportation process by air. Starting from ultimate development of cleaning technologies, through contactless and biometric procedures with customers, airline technologies will rapidly expand in:

- ultra violet cabin systems and light defense versions;
- hi-tech vending machines for food and beverage;
- worksite labs for digital PCR shallow nasal swab tests;
- full automation of handling luggage – towing tractor;
- touchless lavatories, splash guard equipped toilets;
- mobile applications for organizing the process of personal transportation;
- cabin air filtration systems;
- UV cleaning of cabin, seats, surfaces without the use of chemicals (UV Wand);
- innovative, protective antimicrobial sprays in the cabins;
- UV lights on board of the aircraft;
- hi-tech LED system in the sanitary facilities, helping to keep the distance and limit the accumulation of passengers (Tooshlight LED Systems)
- mobile applications for reservations such as "green secured corridors" (VERIFLY);
- digital health cards, digital certificates proving the absence of coronavirus infection.

Considering the above stated technologies we should take into consideration that their role is more supportive in nature, realizing the essential travel of the passenger towards the end consumption of his / her tourist product. Similar technological preventions are expected quickly to enter the hospitality sector as well as the fields of food and beverage industries. According to FIT4FUTURE Project (2021), 2040 is the end year when all contemporary sci-fi air travel opportunities would come true in practical product versions.

3. Guidelines for tourism development after pandemia

The guidelines for tourism development are also logically connected with the public and private fields of implementation within destination countries. We may shortly outline the following recommendations for tourism development after pandemia:

- Governments may efficiently use the lock down periods for new investments in tourism physical and technological infrastructure;
- The coordination between tourism sectors (aviation, railways, hospitality) should be enhanced;
- Greater public – private cooperation should be established in the field of health and safety standards;
- Tourist companies and tourism authorities have to positively influence customers to overcome fear for travelling;
- Tourist companies have the main task to regain customer trust and willingness to travel;
- Tourist companies have to redesign their tourist products concerning the level of quality, terms for redirections, changes and cancellations from customers;
- Tourist companies and tourism authorities have to revive tourism brands by focusing on their experience with customers;
- Enhanced digitalization of tourism process should be in line with enhanced human touch with customers;
- Tourism brands should be optimally developed in line with customer relations in new creative ways of performance;

4. Conclusions

In times of pandemic like Covid – 19 it is difficult for scientific researchers and business experts to provide accurate forecasts about opportunities for future development of tourism industry. For that reason tourist companies are still exposed to highly dynamic changes in their external environment which make them shift their plans from applying optimal profitability strategies into regimes of survival. The accumulated knowledge about the results of pandemic national lock downs could be much valuable for overcoming eventual similar types of crisis situations in future. The scientific approach of forecasting should be wisely used along with all types of intuitive methods. It is evident that 2021 will remain as a period of a continuing transformation of tourism business all over the world. It seems positive that tourism business should get out the best of this challenge in order to progress in a more sustainable manner. One thing is for sure - when Covid – 19 crisis is over, tourism will not only revive its nature but will witness booming times in new dimensions.

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