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### **COVID-19 pandemic, tourism and degrowth**

*The COVID-19 (commonly referred to as the Coronavirus) outbreak and its massive and swift spread halted mobility globally on an unprecedented scale and substantially and abruptly slowed down the consumption of tourism. This chapter aims to provide a brief assessment of this pandemic which has become a health, economic and geopolitical crisis with direct and enormous effects on the tourism industry at international, national and local levels. It also deals with how enforced degrowth and slow consumption ensued from the unprecedented lockdown and social distancing practices by government have provided unique opportunity for the reset of tourism. The chapter also discusses the challenges of the pandemic in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and is finished by critical discussion of transformative discourse shaped in the aftermath of this outbreak in the wider academic community.*

**Keywords:** COVID-19 pandemic; crisis in tourism; lockdown; slow consumption; mobility restrictions; transformation

## Introduction

According to many media and academic commentators, the COVID-19 pandemic has provided a space for the potential transformations of the tourism industry as well the context in which it operates and from being a force of exploitative, capitalist globalization and neoliberal injustices (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020) towards a more resilient, responsible and sustainable tourism (Cheer, 2020; Galvani et al., 2020; Ioannides & Gyimóthy, 2020; Kwok & Koh, 2020; Rowen, 2020). Niewiadomski (2020) argues that one of the fundamental effects of COVID-19 is that the world is experiencing a temporary de-globalisation. He further states that failure and incapability of the market in resolving the crisis, with a consequent strengthening and revival of nation state, which can be seen in the border control and travel restrictions taken by government and the range of governmental recovery packages that have been implemented. Undoubtedly, the limitations on global mobility as a consequence of COVID-19 is significant but this does represent only one dimension of globalization. Other key dimensions of globalization such as the global financial system and the mobility of capital, and the global ICT network continue to operate and as the emergence of new platforms, such as Zoom and other web-based video conferencing tools, indicates may have even been strengthened in some aspects.

Brouder (2020) argues that the COVID-19 crisis has been different from other crisis such as 11 September 2011 or the global financial crisis of 2008 and believes that the former provides a unique opportunity for transformative change in tourism. Brouder (2020) further proposes a matrix of potential evolutionary pathways towards tourism transformation, which he claims that it is largely rely on the sufficient institutional innovation occurs on both the tourists and the hosting destinations as well as emerging of new paths. Nevertheless, the inherent uncertainty surrounding the pandemic and its magnitude, volatility and profile of this crisis suggests that its character is very different compared with previous ones (UNWTO, 2020a) and has challenged any prediction and conceptualisation of the transformative paths. As a result, the coronavirus pandemic is so far-reaching in terms of its potential economic, social, environmental and political impacts and has grown so rapidly and abruptly that making forecasts has become quite challenging.

Nevertheless, for many concerned with the effects of growthism in tourism and in the wider ecological economy, COVID-19 is regarded as potentially enabling a sustainability or socio-

technical transition (Cohen, 2020; Sarkis et al., 2020; Wells et al., 2020). From a tourism perspective the need for an effective sustainability transition is regarded as critical (Hall et al., 2017; Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019; Hall et al., 2020a). As Fletcher et al. (2020) suggest:

... 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.

Since the advent of the COVID 19 pandemic, many believe that the mobility restrictions across the globe have been able to curb some forms of pollution such as air and have contributed to the actions against climate change. For instance, a report showed that the crisis temporarily cut CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in China by 25% in the aftermath of the lockdown measures in the country (Myllyvirta, 2020) while air quality improved considerably in many parts of the world during lockdowns (Baldasano, 2020; Li et al., 2020; Mahato et al., 2020; Sharma et al., 2020). Nevertheless, even though the air quality effects experienced by people during lockdowns were substantial, the actual long-term impact is potentially negligible. Forster et al. (2020) estimate that global NO<sub>x</sub> emissions declined by as much as 30% in April 2020, contributing a short-term cooling effect. However, this cooling trend was offset by ~20% reduction in global SO<sub>2</sub> emissions that weakens the aerosol cooling effect, causing short-term warming. As a result, they estimate that the direct effect of the pandemic-driven response represents a cooling of only around  $0.01 \pm 0.005$  °C by 2030 compared to a baseline scenario that follows current national policies (Forster et al., 2020). Their conclusion being that substantial cuts in greenhouse gas emissions are still necessary.

COVID-19 is both a public health crisis and a real-time experiment in downsizing the consumer economy and many suggest that this pandemic may represent the beginning of a sustainable consumption transition (Goffman, 2020; Ateljevic, 2020; Brouder, 2020), and offers an opportunity to reset and reshape tourism in a more sustainable way (Hall et al., 2020a; Cheer, 2020; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020). This is also commented by major global institutions:

The pandemic is an unprecedented wake-up call, laying bare deep inequalities and exposing precisely the failures that are addressed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on climate change (United Nations (UN), 2020a)

Nevertheless, this outbreak has challenged the SDGs which were supposed to be attained by 2030, and many of the goals enshrined in the SDGs are facing severe setbacks as a result of the economic and social consequences of COVID-19 (Barbier & Burgess, 2020; Leal Filho, Brandli, Lange Salvia, Rayman-Bacchus, & Platje, 2020). Caught in a vicious negative feedback development loop, the lack of progress towards achieving the SDGs has actually made many countries, and especially developing countries, much more vulnerable to the pandemic than they should be (UN, 2020a). With the impacts on the global economy making it extremely difficult to generate, “financial and technical support for the poorest and most vulnerable people and countries hardest hit” (UN, 2020a, p. 1). According to Sumner, Hoy and Ortiz-Juarez (2020) as a result of COVID-19 global poverty could increase for the first time since 1990 and could represent a reversal of approximately a decade of progress in poverty reduction. “In some regions the adverse impacts could result in poverty levels similar to those recorded 30 years ago. Under the most extreme scenario of a 20 per cent income or consumption contraction, the number of people living in poverty could increase by 420–580 million, relative to the latest official recorded figures for 2018” (Sumner et al., 2020, p. 2). Table 14.1 shows the various effects of this pandemic on each goal of SDGs (UN, 2020b) and the responses that are required to be taken for pandemic recovery. As Barbier and Burgess (2020) observe:

The COVID-19 pandemic is causing a growing financial burden on all countries, disrupting economies and causing hundreds of thousands of deaths globally. Low and middle-income economies will additionally suffer from the lack of international funding available for achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), climate change mitigation and adaptation, and biodiversity conservation. The pandemic is likely to further undermine progress towards the SDGs by 2030, which was already faltering even before the outbreak.

Table 14.1 COVID-19 and the SDGs

SDG	COVID-19 effects	COVID-19 responses
Goal 1: No poverty	Intensifying the global poverty rate; loss of income and increase in poverty rate especially for vulnerable groups of society	supporting low- and middle-income countries and vulnerable groups such as women and children
Goal 2: Zero hunger	Disruption in food production and distribution	Ensuring prompt measures needed for viable food supply chains to mitigate the risk of large shocks; boosting social protection programmes; keeping global food trade and domestic supply chain going; supporting smallholder farmers' ability to increase food production.
Goal 3: Good health and well-being	Devastating effects on health outcomes	Coordinated support required from the international community; accelerating research and development of a vaccine and treatments; providing guidance and advice for people to look after their mental health
Goal 4: Equality education	Closure of schools; lack of proper and efficient remote learning; acceptability of remote learning for all	Helping countries in mobilizing resources and implementing innovative and context-appropriate solutions to provide education remotely, leveraging hi-tech, low-tech and no-tech approaches; seeking equitable solutions and universal access
Goal 5: Gender equality	Women's economic gain at risk; increased levels of violence against women; increased exposure to COVID-19 among health and social care women workers	Mitigating gender-based violence, including domestic violence; providing social protection and economic stimulus packages for women and girls; coordination mechanisms include gender perspectives
Goal 6: Clean water and sanitation	Supply disruptions and inadequate access to clean water, sanitation	Funding and support to reach more girls and boys with basic water, sanitation and hygiene facilities in remote areas and slump; continued support to affected, at-risk, low-capacity and fragile countries
Goal 7: Affordable and clean energy	Supply and personnel shortage and disruption in access to electricity; further weakening health system response and capacity	Prioritizing energy solutions to power health clinics and first responders; keeping vulnerable consumers connected; increasing reliable, uninterrupted, and sufficient energy production in preparation for a more sustainable economic recovery

Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth	Suspension of economic activities; lower income; less work time; massive unemployment	Ensuring the availability of essential health services and protection of health systems; helping people cope with adversity, through social protection and basic services; protecting jobs, supporting SMEs and informal sector workers through economic response and recovery programmes; promoting social cohesion and investing in community-led resilience and response systems
Goal 9: Industry, innovation and infrastructure	Substantial reduction in global manufacturing growth; disruptions in global value chains and the supply of products.	Providing and making digital technologies accessible for all; investments in infrastructure to accelerate economic recovery
Goal 10: Reduced inequalities	Deepened existing inequalities especially most vulnerable groups and communities; on economic inequalities and fragile social safety	Scale-up of international support and political commitment aiming to support low and middle income countries and vulnerable groups; investing in policies and institutions that can turn the tide on inequality
Goal 11: Sustainable cities and communities	Population living in slumps face higher risk of exposure to COVID-19 for high population density and poor sanitation conditions	Supporting local governments and community-driven solutions in informal settlements; providing urban data, evidence-based mapping and knowledge for informed decision; mitigating economic impact and initiate recovery
Goal 12: Responsible consumption and production	Offered an opportunity to build recovery plans and responsible and sustainable consumption and production patterns	Profound and systemic shift to a more sustainable economy that works for both people and the planet and social change
Goal 13: Climate action	Reduced commitment to climate action; less environmental footprints	Green transition; green jobs and sustainable and inclusive growth; green economy; investing in sustainable solutions; confronting all climate risks; and cooperation
Goal 14: Life below water	Temporary shutdown of activities as well as reduced human mobility and resource demands	Long-term solutions for the health of our planet as a whole; reviving the ocean and start building a sustainable ocean economy
Goal 15: Life on land	highlighted the need to address threats to ecosystems and wildlife	Helping nations manage COVID-19 waste; delivering a transformational change for nature and people; working to ensure

		economic recovery packages create resilience to future crises; and modernizing global environmental governance
Goal 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions	Increased geopolitical conflicts; increased level of risk for conflict areas,	Respecting human rights; calling for a global ceasefire; protecting UN personnel and their capacity to continue critical operations; supporting refugees and displaced people
Goal 17: Partnerships for the goals	Aggregate backlash against globalization; massive recession of global economy	Increasing international cooperation on public health through global solidarity mainly for developing countries and the most vulnerable populations, including refugees and internally displaced persons

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Source: United Nations (2020b); High (2020)

Undoubtedly, the COVID-19 pandemic has slowed down the “runaway consumption train” (United Nations Development Program (UNDP), 1998). However, it has also caused both directly and indirectly incredible turbulence within the global economic system as a result of its effects on supply chains, the capacity to engage in international trade, international mobility, finance, cash flows, retail, and consumer behaviour (Hall et al., 2020b; Shafi, Liu, & Ren, 2020), and especially tourism (Gössling et al., 2020; Hall et al., 2020a). A clear outcome of the impacts of COVID-19 and the closing of many international borders during lockdowns is that the economic and employment effects have led to calls for economic stimulation packages from governments (International Labour Organisation (ILO), 2020; International Monetary Fund (IMF), 2020; OECD, 2020)). However, the nature of any stimulation package and its connection, if any, to decarbonization, environmental and welfare policies, will clearly have long-term implications for the nature of growth and sustainability. Perhaps somewhat optimistically, Newell and Dale (2020):

Returning to ‘business as usual’ will not happen, and we are entering a period of ‘new normal’. COVID-19 has exposed vulnerabilities that extend beyond pandemic issues, necessitating thinking beyond solely pandemic responses and addressing broader resilience to a range of disturbances. ... Economic recovery after such a global pause can be accelerated by a green new deal leading to a post-pandemic carbon-neutral economy. However, economic stimulation needs to embrace diversification and avoid focusing

investment in single industries or sub-industries, regardless of whether these are ‘green’ (i.e., eco-tourism, solar).

The need for an appropriate response, including degrowth strategies, to the global heating crisis has been long standing. However, to what extent does the COVID-19 pandemic provide a realistic basis for a sustainable transition? This chapter discusses the impact of COVID-19 on tourism and the role of degrowth as a response. It first examines why the COVID-19 pandemic provides a potential opportunity for slowing growth and enabling sustainable consumption before looking at COVID-19 and its effects on tourism. The chapter then concludes by noting that many of the government responses to COVID-19 are not geared towards green responses but are instead reinforce business as usual or worse. As a result, the prospects for a global sustainable transition appear limited.

### *Slowing growth*

Changing consumption and concomitant lifestyles is a socio-political issue, not just an economic and environmental one, especially with respect to factoring in equity within and between societies. There can be no presumption that growth alone increases welfare, rather welfare is an issue of distribution of wealth. If progressive taxes and appropriate regulation and state intervention were necessary for the functioning of the welfare state as a response to the socio-economic shocks of the second world war and the preceding depression, then similar socio-technical system change is surely required for the current COVID-19 and environmental shocks. This is particularly important because of the limited capacities for changing individual behaviours via social marketing interventions or nudging in the time period available to avoid disastrous environmental change arising from current patterns of material consumption (Hall, 2013, 2014, 2016). As Vermeulen (2009, p. 25) argues, the focus of responses to overconsumption needs to be on “structures as a whole, rather than their individual actions. Short-term solutions may rely on improving efficiencies within existing modes of production and consumption (reformist changes). In the longer term, however, what is needed is a re•think of how and what we consume (transformist changes).”

Hall (2011, 2015) essentially identifies three different approaches to the growth crisis. (1) A business as usual (BAU) approach which, if anything, may only intensify existing market-oriented approaches to the problem of growth – what in policy terms may be described as a first

order change. (2) A green growth approach which still utilizes quantitative notions of output but which puts a strong focus on technological solutions and greater efficiency in MRE use. (3) A degrowth approach that seeks to integrate efficiency and sufficiency approaches.

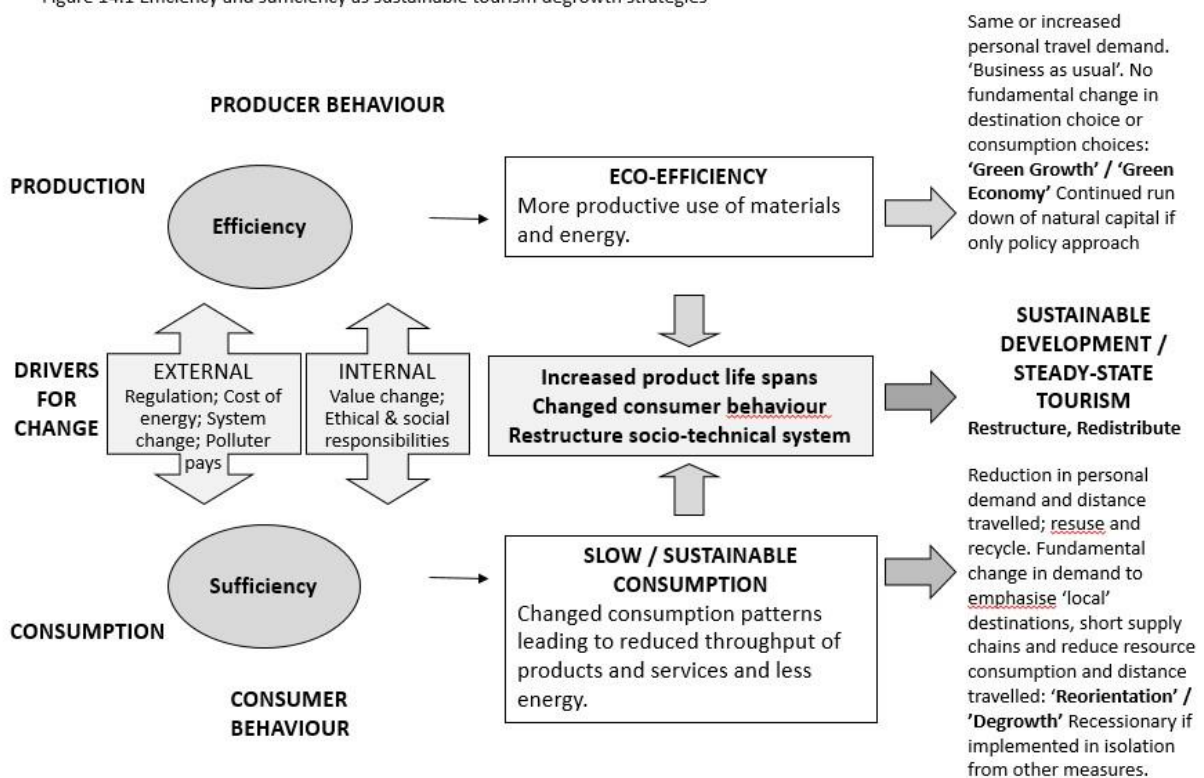
Given the role of rebound effects and the interconnectedness of growth and MRE consumption, “Energy-efficient technological improvements as the solution for the world’s energy and environmental problems will not work. Rather energy-efficient technology improvements are counter-productive, promoting energy consumption. Yet energy efficiency improvements continue to be promoted as a panacea” (Polimeni, 2008, p. 169). Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise this this does not mean that MRE efficient technologies should not be promoted. Instead, it depends on their context and the overall nature of consumption, not only within tourism but the transfer of consumption between tourism and other aspects of what individuals consume within specific socio-technical systems. As Polimeni et al. (2008, p. 169), note, “If individual energy consumption behaviours are significantly altered to reduce consumption and this behaviour is unwavering, then energy efficient technologies can further reduce energy consumption”.

The third approach reflects what has been suggested in the debate over growth and the environment since the 1960s (Boulding, 1966; Daly, 1991; Latouche, 2009; Polimeni et al., 2008; Hall, 2015), which is that a sufficiency approach is required that limits consumption patterns in relation to bio-physical constraints. As Czech (2006, p. 1653) comments, so long as economic growth is the focus, whether ‘green’ or not, “technological progress will not result in biodiversity conservation; rather, an expansion of the human niche and the consumption of more natural resources will result”.

Hall (2009, 2015) sought to develop a framework for efficiency (green growth) and sufficiency (degrowth) in sustainable tourism in order to respond to the problematic fixation with visitor growth economic growth, what Georgescu-Roegen (1977) termed “growth mania” (Figure 14.1). Hall (2009, 2010) integrated Daly’s notion of a steady state economy with that of degrowth (Kerschner, 2010; Buch-Hansen, 2014) and suggested the notion of steady-state tourism, defining it as a tourism system (whether, destination, regional or global) that encourages qualitative development, with a focus on quality of life and social and ecological well-being measures, but not aggregate quantitative growth to the detriment of natural capital. Arguing that the problem with tourism is that the larger something has grown, the greater,

ceteris paribus, are its maintenance costs (Hall, 2011, 2015). One of the significant aspects of Hall's model is that he argued that the lower rates of maintenance throughput in a tourism system that arise from a degrowth/steady-state approach would have to be carefully managed, because an emphasis on short-supply chains, local destinations and reduced resource consumption and distance travelled would be recessionary if implemented in isolation from other measures (Hall, 2015). This is therefore something that can be examined in the 'natural experiment' that arises from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourism.

Figure 14.1 Efficiency and sufficiency as sustainable tourism degrowth strategies



Source: After Hall, C.M. (2007). The possibilities of slow tourism: Can the slow movement help develop sustainable forms of tourism consumption? Paper presented at Achieving Sustainable Tourism, Helsingborg, Sweden, 11-14 September.

## COVID-19

The novel coronavirus COVID-19 spread swiftly around world from the end of 2019. As of mid-August, 2020, nearly 21 million cases have been reported and over 750,000 people had died of this virus worldwide (World Health Organization (WHO), 2020). Quarantines, mobility restrictions and strict social distancing measures implemented in response to the pandemic, led to an unprecedented downturn in the global economy, disrupted supply chains, sharply reduced production and consumption leading to dramatic declines in employment and the GDP

(Gössling et al., 2020). The World Bank's (2020) global economic baseline forecast suggested a 5.2 percent contraction in global GDP in 2020, triggering the deepest global recession in decades and meaning that per capita incomes in most emerging and developing economies will shrink (World Bank, 2020). However, the long-term economic impact will depend on the combination of: the medical capacity to restrict the effects of the coronavirus; the measures put in place to restrict transmission; the characteristics of government interventions to boost the economy; and business and consumer behaviour.

Tourism, which is often regarded to be one of the most labour-intensive sectors of the economy, has been dramatically affected by the pandemic because of the impact on international aviation and travel (Hall et al., 2020a). The July 2020 International Air Transport Association (IATA) forecast is for global enplanements to fall 55% in 2020 compared to 2019. Passenger numbers are expected to rise 62% in 2021 compared to 2020, but still down almost 30% compared to 2019. A full recovery to 2019 levels is not expected until 2023 (IATA, 2020). According to the UNWTO (2020b) the near-complete lockdown imposed by countries around the world in response to the pandemic in May 2020 led to a 98% fall in international tourist numbers in that month when compared to 2019. The UNWTO also reported a fall of 300 million international tourists representing a 56% year-on-year drop in tourist arrivals between January and May 2020. This translates into a loss of US\$320 billion in international tourism receipts – more than three times the amount during the Global Economic Crisis of 2009 (UNWTO, 2020b).

The economies of emerging destination and destinations largely dependent on tourism such as Small Islands Development States (SIDS) are being hit hard by the collapse of the tourism sector. For instance, tourism which accounts for 50 to 90 percent of GDP and employment in some countries in the Caribbean, have largely been economically crippled by the pandemic, with millions of jobs at risk (Srinivasan, Muñoz, & Chensavasdjai, 2020). The virus also affected the world's top tourist destinations. For instance, Europe which was the most visited continent by international tourists welcomed 672 million tourists in 2019, nearly half of the international arrivals in the world, is estimated to experience a financial loss of roughly €1 billion per month (Brzozowski, 2020). Despite the effects of the pandemic on the global tourism industry, many believe that the COVID-19 pandemic has given a rare opportunity for tourism degrowth and transformation and questioning the meaning of globalized tourism in an attempt to encourage a more responsible and/or sustainable tourism (Hall et al., 2020a; Ateljevic, 2020; Brouder, 2020; Cheer, 2020; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020; Gössling et al., 2020; Prayag, 2020).

Nevertheless, this transformation is neither guaranteed nor necessarily the most appropriate with respect to tourism from a degrowth perspective.

### **COVID-19 and slowing down consumption**

As discussed above, the COVID-19 pandemic slowed down the global economy leading to a massive recession and dramatically changed consumer spending. Consumer spending is one of the most important driving forces for global economic growth (Baker et al., 2020; Jones, 2020), and the COVID-19 pandemic has triggered a massive transformation in customer purchasing patterns with many customers grappling with uncertainty (Hall, 2020b; Jones, 2020). The empirical study of Andersen et al. (2020) shows the effect of social distancing laws on consumer spending in Scandinavia. They reported that aggregate spending dropped by around 25 percent in Sweden and by four additional percentage points in Denmark. Similarly, the study of Chen, Qian and Wen (2020) on the impact of COVID-19 on consumption after China's outbreak in late January 2020 shows that spending on goods and services were significantly affected, with a decline of 33% and 34%, respectively; within dining and entertainment and travel declining by 64% and 59%.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant disruptions in global tourism industry (Hall et al., 2020a, 2020b; Gössling et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic brought international travel to an abrupt halt and therefore greatly affected global mobility (UNCTAD, 2020). Remarkably, the UNWTO reported in May 2020 that 100 per cent of global destinations had introduced some form of travel restrictions which represents the most severe restriction on international travel in history (UNWTO, 2020a). Due to the resulting travel restrictions as well as the slump in demand among travelers, the COVID-19 pandemic has had significant impacts on lodging, car rental, and cruise lines and airlines and the broader aviation and travel sector. Significant reductions in passenger numbers culminated in the cancelation of flights which drastically decreased airline profits and caused many of them to lay off staff or declare bankruptcy. IATA reported that the airline industry lost \$314 billion in revenues due to the sharp reduction in the number of passengers. They also indicated that airlines would require \$200 billion in bailouts to survive the crisis (Jasper & Philip, 2020). Similar to aviation sector, the cruise industry and lodging sector also witnessed sharp declines (Cheer, 2020) and a collapse in share prices. For example, Carnival's stock dropped by nearly 60% while Royal Caribbean and Norwegian have lost more than 70% of their value (Businesswire, 2020). This was an especially important issue

for many small island nations that depend heavily on the employment and cash flow that ships generate. Other sectors within the tourism and hospitality industry were also substantially crippled. For instance, short-term rental platforms like Airbnb were affected (Kuhzady, Seyfi, & Béal, 2020). Although P2P accommodation and Airbnb in particular were increasing in popularity prior to the COVID-19 epidemic, major shifts have been seen in demand for short-term rentals (DuBois, 2020). For instance, Airbnb's revenue in 2020 is expected to be less than half of what it was in 2019 (Kuhzady et al., 2020).

The pandemic, albeit temporarily, did reduce 'over-tourism', with many local residents in tourist destinations unhappy with the overwhelming number of tourists which they believed was disrupting their life, a phenomenon which gained popular interest among tourism academics and practitioners as well as wider media coverage (Milano, Cheer, & Novelli, 2019; Phi, 2019; Sæþórsdóttir, Hall, & Wendt, 2020). However, in the light of COVID-19 outbreak and growing mobility restrictions and restricted lockdowns and quarantine in nearly all tourism destinations in response to the pandemic, the concern for overtourism was replaced by a newfound worry of 'undertourism' or the complete absence of tourism which was previously only a marginal issue for major tourist destinations (Romagosa, 2020; Sæþórsdóttir et al., 2020). Yet the overtourism/undertourism issue clearly restates the classic issue of finding the appropriate 'balance' between tourism and destinations. Importantly, this was being articulated before COVID-19. In the case of coastal areas for example, Hjalager (2020) was suggesting that undertourism existed in many areas where there appeared to be no other development opportunities apart from tourism. Similarly, Haywood (2020) commented that "in reality, the vast majority of communities-as-destinations suffer from under-tourism – a problem that is bound to become an even more serious as economies tank and poverty levels ratchet up [as a result of COVID-19]". Such a position reflects the seemingly automatic position of many tourism researchers, as well as the tourism industry, that tourism should be used as a form of economic development, which stands in contrast to a broader perspective that the best form of tourism may well be little or no tourism at all (Hall, 2008). Just as significantly the undertourism/overtourism question of balance also returns us to the key question of balance in the understanding of what sustainability means in a tourism context.

For example, the UNEP and the UNWTO (2005) publication *Making Tourism More Sustainable: Guide for Policy Makers*, described by Eugenio Yunis, UNWTO Head of sustainable development of tourism as "applicable world-wide... a 'bible' for all decision-

makers who are encouraged to be actively involved in the development of an environmentally and socially responsible tourism which creates long term economic benefits for the businesses and destinations” (Yunis, 2006, p. 2), argues that sustainable tourism is based on the three pillars (economic, social, environmental) of sustainable development and that “delivering sustainable development *means striking a balance between them*” (UNEP & UNWTO, 2005, p. 9; our emphasis).

This notion of balance is one of the cornerstones of the so-called sustainable tourism paradigm that has come to be normalized by the tourism industry, policy makers and the majority of the tourism academy (Hall, 1994, 2011). To illustrate this Hall (2011) provided the example of an inquiry undertaken by the British Independent Television Commission in 1998 with respect to an attack on the environmental movement in a Channel Four television programme “Against Nature”, first shown in the United Kingdom in November and December 1997. In the programme’s defence, Michael Jackson, Chief Executive of Channel Four, wrote “The small but significant group of people who hold views opposed to the environmental lobby have rarely been seen on British television” (quoted in Edwards, 1998, p. 201). In response an editorial of the *Ecologist* magazine stated: “Jackson’s view is the norm for a culture in which business dominance is so total, so normal, that any challenges to that domination are seen as ‘biased’ and ‘strange’, requiring immediate balance” (Edwards, 1998, p. 201). Similarly, in an academic vein Edgell (2006, p. 24) states that, “For sustainable tourism to be successful, long-term policies that balance environmental, social, and economic issues must be fashioned” with the preface to the first edition of the book noting that it “stresses that positive sustainable tourism development is dependent on forward looking policies and new management philosophies that seek harmonious relations between local communities, the private sector, not-for-profit organizations, academic institutions, and governments at all levels to develop practices that protect natural, built, and cultural environments *in a way compatible with economic growth*” (Edgell, 2006, p. xiii; our emphasis); while the preface to the third edition states: “Sustainable tourism is part of an overall shift that recognizes that orderly economic growth combined with concerns for the environment and quality-of-life social values, will be the driving force for long-term progress in tourism development and policies” (Edgell, 2020). Nevertheless, the argument is somewhat circular as the book also states that, “orderly economic growth” is “part of the goal of sustainable tourism” (Edgell, 2020). Although economic growth has become an undefined ‘orderly economic growth’ in the book’s new edition it is still economic growth.

In addition to the fetishization of economic growth, tourism stakeholders, even given the issues of overtourism, fail to address the fundamental growth problem. Instead, the ongoing message of international tourism bodies in relation to tourism and sustainability is that a continued focus on improved competitiveness, efficiency, the market and growth is the answer, even though it must be done “better” (Zurab Pololikashvili, Secretary-General of the UNWTO, in UNWTO, 2018).

Tourism’s sustained growth brings immense opportunities for economic welfare and development’, said the UNWTO Secretary-General, while warning at the same time that it also brings in many challenges. ‘Adapting to the challenges of safety and security, constant market changes, digitalization and the limits of our natural resources should be priorities in our common action’ ... The UNWTO Secretary-General stressed education and job creation, innovation and technology, safety and security; and sustainability and climate change as the priorities for the sector to consolidate its contribution to sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda, against the backdrop of its expansion in all world regions and the socio-economic impact this entails. To address these issues, Mr. Pololikashvili concluded that ‘public/private cooperation as well as public/public coordination must be strengthened, in order to translate tourism growth into more investment, more jobs and better livelihoods (UNWTO, 2018).

Sustainability itself is strongly positioned by the UNWTO as an economic and competitive value rather than an ethical or environmental one. For example, in its focus on the SDGs it comments: “many companies already seem to acknowledge that their contribution [to the SDGs] should be integrated into core business and form an inherent part of the creation of value to succeed on today’s markets” (UNWTO & UNDP, 2017, p. 41). Hall (2019) argues that the UNWTO, like all major tourism institutions, treat sustainability and overtourism as managerial issues, i.e. that all that is needed to solve them is to improve management practices together with better information and greater efficiency. For example, the UNWTO and UNDP (2017, p. 14) state, “Both countries and companies lack frameworks to capture, aggregate and report on the full economic, social and environmental impacts of tourism [with respect to] Improving performance by measuring impact and sharing knowledge”. While they go on to define sustainable tourism as “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts” (UNWTO & UNDP, 2017, p. 17). Although of course account for impact is not the same as changing practices. Nevertheless, measurement, surveillance, control,

and regulation lie at the core of managerialist values developed in an economic and philosophical context where process is subordinated to output (and profit) (Lynch, 2014).

The conclusion to the foreword of the WTTC and McKinsey & Company (2017, p. 5) report on *Managing Overtourism in Tourism Destinations* states: “To solve this challenge [of overtourism], leaders must be willing to identify and address the barriers (including beliefs, norms, and structures) that are holding us back from effectively managing overcrowding. And they must look for ways to compromise: when overcrowding goes too far, the repercussions are difficult to reverse”. However, cuts in visitor numbers is rarely the strategy adopted to manage tourism. Instead, the managerial focus is on shifting demand in space and time and searching for greater efficiencies. At the macro-level economic growth and its relationship to visitor growth are not fundamentally questioned. Such perspectives also constrain responses to COVID-19. Demands from industry to open up travel bridges and bubbles for economic reasons have been widespread and, in many countries, have arguably outweighed health concerns, leading to further waves of COVID-19 cases (Australian Leisure Management, 2020; BBC, 2020; McIlroy & Cranston, 2020; Sullivan, 2020). The active promotion of domestic tourism in many countries as a result of holidaymakers not being able to travel internationally has also highlighted the issues involved in shifting tourist consumers from one location to another. For example, record numbers of visitors to the UK countryside have caused huge problems with complaints “that a new generation of holidaymakers are treating the countryside like a festival site, leaving behind tents, chairs and excrement, as well as endangering rare habitats and wildlife” (Barkham, 2020). The problem of overtourism has therefore simply shifted in time and space. Encouraging people to travel domestically may therefore reduce the amount of emissions but the UK experience shows that other environmental impacts have occurred instead. Fundamentally, there is therefore a need for changed behaviours and strategies that better acknowledge the environmental and social dimensions of tourism as well as the economic ones. As the COVID-19 experience shows, slowing tourism related consumption does have recessionary impacts but restarting tourism as part of a sustainable transition also means that tourism needs to be reimagined in order to contribute to sustainability.

## **Conclusion**

The lack of tourism as the result of COVID-19 health concerns and associated travel restrictions has significantly affected the socio-economic condition of destinations worldwide

(Sæþórsdóttir et al., 2020). However, the future of post-viral tourism is largely dependent on different issues such the duration of the pandemic, the severity and stringency of social distancing interventions on business, the magnitude and effectiveness of government stimulus packages, and business and consumer behaviours (Hall et al., 2020a). As this chapter has observed, a number of commentators and academics have suggested that the coronavirus crisis may help move the world toward responsible, sustainable and socially innovative tourism (Galvani et al., 2020; Romagosa, 2020). Such optimistic perspectives have however tended not to fundamentally challenge treating issues of growth beyond managerialist options.

As Hall (2015) has suggested, changing consumption and concomitant lifestyles is a socio-political issue, not just an economic and environmental one, factoring in equity within and between societies in particular (Khor, 2011). There can be no presumption that growth alone increases welfare, rather welfare is an issue of distribution of wealth. If progressive taxes and appropriate regulation and state intervention were necessary for the functioning of the welfare state as a response to the socio-economic shocks of the second world war and the preceding depression, then similar socio-technical system change is surely required for the current shocks (Hall, 2015). Vermeulen (2009, p. 25) argues that the focus of responses to overconsumption needs to be on “structures as a whole, rather than their individual actions. Short-term solutions may rely on improving efficiencies within existing modes of production and consumption (reformist changes). In the longer term, however, what is needed is a re•think of how and what we consume (transformist changes)”.

Issues of growth, including the response to COVID-19, sustainable tourism and overtourism are framed as managerial problems by government, industry and most tourism researchers. Yet, as Hall (2011, p. 661) pointed out, the continuing contribution of a growing tourism industry to unsustainable global change “raises a clear question as to whether sustainable tourism can actually be achieved via a so-called “balanced” approach that seeks to continue to promote economic growth”. Green growth and the management of visitor growth as part of the response to overtourism are little more than a marginal reform of a socio-economic system unsustainably geared towards economic growth. They are not major shifts in the tourism policy paradigm (Hall, 2011). It is not just a case of tourism getting more efficient, as important as that is. Tourism consumption needs to be spatially and temporally shifted in order to reduce its overall emissions and MRE consumption. But a degrowth response to tourism also needs to go further than managerial, and technological responses and deal with the nature of consumptive

behaviour otherwise destination managers, mediated by state agencies, corporate interests and economic rationality, may ‘manage’ resources into oblivion – what Hall (2019) described as “Brundtland-as-usual”. Instead, tourism and travel behaviours need to shift from being focused on efficiency and management to traveling within the environmental, social, economic limits of the ecosystems of which humanity is a part.

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