



PostCovid19: The only possible Horizon for the Tourism Industry is still Sustainability

One of the questions we were asked about the tourism sector, and which is still current today, is whether the development model that the sector had adopted was actively contributing into achieving the objectives set by Agenda 2030.

Our answer is that, if we talk about a tourism standard based on increasing the number of tourists at all costs and on increasing the income generated, regardless of whether it is transformed into local social welfare and without taking into account the amount of resources consumed to do so, then surely we can say no. Tourism is not contributing nor is it serving as an incentive for the processes of change that will allow countries to move towards real sustainability and the full achievement of each and every one of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Tourism, although in a differentiated way and in different contexts, can be a powerful driving force for the fulfilment of most development objectives and for tackling many social difficulties together, especially in those territories that have committed themselves to the sustainable development of this sector.

Thus, **today more than ever**, the ambitions and transformative vision of Agenda 2030 must be adopted within the framework of an approach based firmly on the Theory of Change. In other words, those paradigm shifts to which the tourism sector, as well as the rest of the development drivers, was slowly approaching on the eve of a distant 2030, are today becoming indispensable and the sector will have to be transformed, in many cases radically, in a much shorter time frame. On this depends the survival of the sector and the richness of the cultural exchange that has made it prosper.

Today more than ever we can say that **"if it is not sustainable, it cannot be considered development"** and we, who have been dealing with sustainability for decades, have this consideration rooted in the depths of our souls.

We know that sustainable destinations are characterized by having a solid political-technical structure, whose total involvement in the development of a sustainable tourism system results in the



creation of collaborative synergies and spaces for participation and association at all levels, which ensures the achievement of the highest objectives of local and global sustainability.

Therefore, in these moments of crisis, sustainable tourism destinations must be coordinated through strategic actions so that the interventions by the actors involved during the process are as effective as possible and aim at the social well-being of the communities involved, whether they are recipients or senders.

Because for us, first and foremost, people and their balanced relationship with the planet we all inhabit, are there.

In short, for us who understand tourism only as an element of sustainability, it is fundamentally a matter of **taking pride in our past, managing the present in order to face the crisis that affects us all with determination and projecting ourselves into the future with strength.** The strength of the path we have taken together and in which, like every leader, we help our fellow travellers, so that it is understood that tourism is not secondary to any other sector and that by taking care of the dreams and happiness of tourists, it also takes care of the well-being and growth of the local communities.

For this purpose, it is essential to involve all the stakeholders and tourist forces that interact in and with the destination. **It is also essential to have a common project and a shared vision** that defines the management of the destination and its adequate governance in the short, medium and long term

That tourism governance that involves local administrations, businesses and services of the destination, locals and civil society actors involved, as well as proactive tourists, to join efforts in order **to leave these moments behind with the certainty of having made a change for the better.**

Today, more than ever, **sustainability "is" the solution. It is the pillar to which we can cling without fear.** It is the resilience that the global socio-economic system has shown not to possess. It is the system in which the economy has a clear mission to the well-being and happiness of communities. It is the added value of cooperation, in the face of pure fratricidal competition. It is the area of solid, transparent and participatory institutions. It is the happiness of an intentional and genuine cultural exchange. It is the pride of offering the quality that is generated by the modular interaction of the



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actors of tourism. It is the care we take to make our destination special, without having to destroy it or homologue it to foreign cultures and styles. It is the fierceness of knowing that our collaborators have the opportunity to live a dignified life and that our initiatives are most inclusive and respectful. It is the certainty of struggling to maintain a healthy social, economic, cultural and environmental environment and to be able to continue offering their invaluable services.

In short, working for a better world is our great dignity...
...today more than ever!

This is what we do through the Biosphere Responsible Tourism System. This is what we propose to the whole world. This is how we are willing to collaborate in order to make the new reality of world tourism.



Local and sustainable economy!

As tourism is one of the most important economic sectors in the world and the largest employment opportunity in many of the world's tourist destinations, its contribution to poverty reduction must remain high today more than ever.

Thus, employment levels in the local community, which is notoriously the weakest link in the chain, must be maintained.

Similarly, the short tourism value chain must be guaranteed and the inclusion of mainly local actors and producers of goods and services must be ensured. In other words, maximizing the proportion of expenditure in the destination out of the total expenditure, ensuring that such benefits that reach the destination remain there.

Of vital importance in this objective is the attention and strong demand from the visitor.



Nourishing tourism!

The tourism sector must ensure that local agricultural resources are being made the most of, without compromising the communities' capacity for self-sufficiency.

Likewise, local gastronomic traditions must be offered to the visitor as a priority, in order to value them and avoid the strengthening of globalized food customs that require huge external and technical inputs that are not always available and/or easily accessible.

Reduce imports to a minimum.



Assuming responsibility for safety!

Maintain the destination in a position that offers security in relation to the Covid-19, following local directives in this respect and international best practices.

The destination has to become a transmitter of good security practices to visitors and the rest of the community. And at the same time, reinforcing healthy practices in tourism, such as those in nature, sports, etc.

Also, among the priorities of the destination should be the implementation, where there is no or where it is insufficient or inadequate, of health facilities suitable for the early detection and care of cases, as well as effective systems of transportation of serious cases and confinement.

This will be essential for the recovery of the destination in this period of crisis and may be included in the marketing elements at this time.



No time for ignorance!

The destination should keep a high implementation of differentiated means of information on the scientific advances regarding the pandemic and the required responses, based on reliable sources at national and international levels.

Likewise, the technical skills of the operators of the destination must be guaranteed in relation to techniques for the prevention and containment of infection.

Of no less importance is the transmission of local knowledge and the knowledge of proximity, in order to fully understand the community itself and give it the greatest value. Also, in economic terms.

Offering more knowledge to the visitor turns the destination into a worldwide promoter of coexistence based on respect and encourages empathy between communities and environments, since "no one loves what one does not know".



We're all in this together!

The destination must ensure the inclusion of the weakest categories in the short-term development programmes, in particular women, guaranteeing the capacity to continue to provide benefits to their families, participation in the social and economic life of the destination and the possibility of dignified survival.

Inequality is one of the worst effects of the prevailing economic system.

Let us take advantage of this crisis to say "Enough is enough!" and start to favour women, as well as the other most discriminated categories, in the processes of building development and the future.

In the same way, it is necessary, today more than ever, to eradicate the cancer of sexual tourism and violence, areas on which the destinations will have to pay the greatest and most special attention.



Water is an inalienable right!

The availability of clean running water for all and the sanitation and proper disposal of waste water are of vital importance in maintaining adequate levels of sanitation and limiting the possibilities of infection.

Thus, supply-side actors, in particular those in the accommodation sector, will have to take into account the intrinsic and extrinsic constraints of their own supply and sanitation systems when considering an acceptable number of visitors.

In the same way, the destination and its administration should pay particular attention to ensuring adequate supply and sanitation, in particular by limiting the number of tourists that can be catered for on the basis of supply possibilities and encouraging a significant reduction in consumption and pollution of the resource.





Always efficient and never polluting!

Energy supply services must be guaranteed, especially for the destination's health care facilities, but also in order to ensure that clean-up and infection control operations are carried out correctly. Likewise, the unavailability of clean energy is today one of the main drivers of deforestation and the loss of global biodiversity. By increasing the production of renewable energy, adopting efficient solutions of use and making tourists aware of the importance of their consumption pattern, great results can be obtained.



Serving the community!

Sustainable economic growth includes increasing the share of profits that remain in the destination and ensuring that these resources reach the greatest number of local and community stakeholders, whether they are directly, indirectly or not involved in the tourism sector.

"People first" is the motto of an economy at the service of human welfare and whose growth is in harmony with the environment and translates into happiness for all the actors involved, both on the demand and the supply side.

The destination's promotion in the sending communities has to be based on this paradigm, in addition to the security one, so that the visitor demands strongly the distribution of benefits to the community.



Where future is created!

The transport and communications industries are the ones that are most called upon during this crisis.

In particular, transport must guarantee adequate travel conditions to prevent infection, which will not be very easy but is already being studied by all receiving communities and not, as well as emergency situations that must be covered by the transport sector in order to deal with a rapid and agile transfer of patients in the best conditions of safety.

Likewise, the communications sector must be guaranteed, especially in those localities where it is not always the case, since the limited risk posed by lack of communication before the crisis is today absolutely unacceptable. Thus, localities with deficient communications must be equipped with adequate and resilient systems in the event of subsequent crises of a different nature (blackouts, etc.).

It is equally important to rethink the structure of tourism product supply, so that it becomes modular and includes multi-destination and multi-product situations and promotes the culture of the tourist route, rather than that of the all-inclusive destination.

Sustainable destinations must also become leaders in innovation, seeking a new balance between traditional operators and those who adopt new technologies in the production of memorable experiences.



Cultural Exchange is a powerful tool!

The reduction of inequalities also involves the sending communities, which must ensure that their emissaries contribute to improving the quality of tourism in the destinations, and the destinations must be in a position to demand and assume this type of collaboration from the base.



The administration of the destination must encourage the promotion of structures, companies and products that are committed to inclusion and intentional and constructive cultural exchange, as well as those that involve the tourist in a proactive way.



Smart is Green!

Avoiding the pernicious effects of massification, as well as the fight against over-tourism or the gentrification of destinations, are today essential elements of tourism development. Likewise, the safe movement of large numbers of people must be guaranteed and the provision of basic services for tourism, such as accommodation and guided tours, must be carried out safely, maintaining distances and avoiding the possibility of contagion.

Of no less importance is the promotion of decentralised and diffuse tourism at the destination, so that mass movements between the sites of concentration of tourist attractions and the supply of tourist products, goods and services can be avoided.



Sustainable tourism is a lifestyle!

Production and consumption of tourism, as well as the infinite number of inputs it requires and to which it is deeply linked, means monitoring both sides of the sector's value chain: supply and demand.

Thus, the sustainable tourism sector must continue to be proposed as a determining factor in the change of consumption and production values, both in the receiving and sending communities. Communication in this area must be massive, as well as the adoption to the letter of its paradigms in the destination.



Of no less importance, the production and final disposal of waste, a critical element also because of its potential for infection, should be at the core of a series of appropriate behaviours, both for the resident and the visitor.



Low impact transportation now!

The presence of particles in the air has been identified as a cause of the spread of the virus and an increase in the extent of infection, so the destinations should ensure a drastic reduction in emissions during this period of crisis, pursuing the objectives set much more rigidly. Wherever possible, cycling best meets the objectives of physical distance and low impact, as well as being an excellent means of implementing the multi-destination offer and the philosophy of the route.



Direct from the fisherman!

In the destinations where it applies, we must also bet on a proximity economy that prioritizes local fishing workers and short supply chains, avoiding globalized and super-technified products.

Likewise, it is important to take advantage of this crisis to reduce the impact of tourism on aquatic ecosystems, both coastal and marine, promoting respectful and knowledge-based tourism, eliminating plastics from the value chain of sun and beach tourism, where they are the majority of the goods used, and committing to keeping beaches out of the masses.



Don't let your guard down!

Nature tourism, especially inland tourism, given the demand for uncrowded sites, is expected to increase dramatically during the post-confinement phase, so the impacts of tourism on terrestrial ecosystems and protected areas need to be monitored very carefully.

It should be remembered that inland destinations and natural protected areas are not only often sanctuaries of nature or intangible culture, but are not prepared to receive large numbers of tourists, so the negative impacts could be of absolutely unacceptable dimensions.



More destination!

We need more efficient, welfare-oriented administration of communities, both receiving and sending, more transparency, more participation, more equity, as well as less profit at all costs, less exploitation of resources and people, less intolerance, less segregation. In other words, we need tourism that is open and inspires frankness and participation by all.



No one can do this all alone!

Destinations need to start a dialogue with their sending communities to develop common strategies, safe multi-destination products, collaborative networks, exchange of goods and services from the respective communities. We need to build community.

Likewise, in these days of crisis, of confinement and of distance, we have to bet on preventing isolation from becoming individualism and on each one for himself. The tourist destination must



firmly commit to unite the efforts of all operators around the same objective, raise the level of world tourism until it includes corporate responsibility, sustainability and innovation so that the transition to a new model becomes a reality and sets the standard in the tourism sector.

It is no less important that the physical distance to which we are being subjected does not become social distance, since individual protection necessarily passes through collective action and protection.

What we propose to the world from the Institute of Responsible Tourism for the challenge that the future presents us is a new "culture of tourism", in which an integrated vision of the long-term development, and future capacity of human settlements, and the role that the tourism sector plays in the creation of human wellbeing, is manifested with its direct and indirect impacts and with its typical multiplier effect, both in the receiving and sending communities.

In the same way, the indispensable participation of the private sector and civil society in the process of transformation and in the same scope of the ODS, should turn tourism into a powerful engine of that public-private-community-civil society integration that the crisis of globalization based on standardization is demanding from us with great voice.

Last but not least, we believe that today, more than ever, destinations must be provided with a technical-scientific committee, selected for its preparation and intellectual honesty and that is above possible conflicts of interest, which is in charge of translating the immense mass of scientific information into possible recommendations for the action of decision-makers, leaving firmly in the hands of the participating politicians, legitimate representatives of the communities, the final decision of the most appropriate lines of intervention and the necessary actions to put them into effect.

"Today more than ever, if it's not sustainable it's not development"



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Reference paper:

Azcárate T., Benayas J., Nerilli G. y Justel A., 2019. "GUIA PARA UN TURISMO SOSTENIBLE. Retos del sector turístico ante la Agenda 2030", REDS, Madrid.

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