

SPATIAL DIMENSION OF TOURISM IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

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Spatial dimension of tourism in the Anthropocene

Tourism has a significant impact on social and economic changes affecting societies and the Earth as a whole. The impact of tourism on the environment is a very broad one, not least as tourists are associated with excess pollution, especially of water and air. Many traces induced by tourism can be detected globally, because tourism is part of the geophysical forces operating on the planetary scale. The tourism “overcrowding” brings about change on the planet and leaves its Anthropocene traces. Only recently has the Anthropocene become a subject of tourism-specific study. However, as the rapid growth of global tourism stopped suddenly at the beginning of 2020 as a result of the global pandemic of SARS-CoV-2, a window of opportunity arose for exploring tourism’s potentially reduced impact on the planet, and hence its fate and role in the Anthropocene. The author proposes a few priority areas for future research.

Key words: tourism, Anthropocene, overtourism, tourismphobia, COVID-19

INTRODUCTION

Today, tourism activity is omnipresent, even if it may still be sporadic and/or of limited intensity in some places. The mainstream tourism industry still appears committed to incessant growth, with international arrivals recently reaching 1.4 billion a year (UNWTO 2019). However, that number would need to be at least doubled or even tripled to take into account domestic tourist arrivals. Depending on its definition, tourism can be considered the largest industry in the world. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) claims that tourism accounts for 10% of global GDP, and hence for 1 in every 10 jobs worldwide (UNWTO 2018). Furthermore, as increasingly mobile societies grow in significance, tourism space is becoming both an ordinary place for recreation, and part of the creative and cultural sector. Obviously, such a huge number of people on the move has an impact on the natural and cultural environment. Indeed, many traces are being left by tourist activities, ranging from the transformation of places, through to the impact on climate and the general troposphere (e.g. air pollution and CO₂ footprints left by travel), to the consumption of resources, globally and locally. Some examples of the transformation of places by tourism could include, but are not limited to changes in relief, modification in flora and fauna, increases and changes in deposited garbage and waste. The main drivers facilitating the growth of tourism are considered to be globalisation, the rapid diffusion of innovation (technologies), and changes in traditional tourism (in terms of both its distribution and functioning). Characteristics of the economy are also of significance to the functioning of tourism, with crucial aspects considered to be the global nature of the economy, acceleration (a shortening of product-life cycles), and the increasing importance of both the knowledge-based economy (and hence innovation, experience and emotion) and network connections.

As space, place and location remain at the heart of geography, geographers are empowered to evaluate tourism holistically and at multiple scales (see Saarinen 2017 and Timothy 2018). *In extremis*, the development of tourism can be seen – in and of itself – as a significant driver of anthropogenic change on Earth. Tourism and mobility also contribute to the transmission of disease, as the world has witnessed in the last years. Yet, while tourism seems assertive in favouring the spread of negative effects, it also proves sensitive or vulnerable – being one of the first areas to suffer when restrictions are introduced or tightened for whatever reason.

This paper seeks to offer a critical overview of the conceptual linkages between tourism and the Anthropocene. As is clear from the above, the first and main method used to compile this paper is a systematic literature review (SLR). On this basis, the article discusses the importance of tourism in the Anthropocene. The ideas based on the relevant literature and the debate hitherto are supplemented by tourism dynamics under COVID and post-COVID circumstances. The paper presents the main relationships between tourism and the Anthropocene and analyses the shaping and modification of space by tourism in the Anthropocene. Finally, new changes and challenges during and after the COVID-19 pandemic are presented. The author summarises a new way of thinking in light of the pandemic that would be useful for new research in a post-COVID world.

TOURISM AND THE ANTHROPOCENE

Tourism is defined as travel away from one's home environment (Hui 2008), and hence a removal from the place of residence or "everyday life", in the direction of a place or places geographically and ontologically distant from work and home, and differing from those linked to the everyday routine (Urry 2002). Classical definitions of tourism obviously pay attention to how tourists are considered to be "visiting", so a condition would be that they are not in the process of settling, nor are they taking up gainful employment or other work (Hunziker 1951). In the 1970s, there was a desire to regard the tourist as someone who travelled willingly and for a period of time (Cohen 1974). In the view of MacCannell (1976) the term tourist should denote the real thing, i.e. somebody absorbed in the visit, mostly middle-class, and dispersed around the world in search of authentic experiences (MacCannell 1976). However, there is simultaneously a second meaning of "tourist" as one of the best models describing the modern person in general. For MacCannell (1976, p. 9), "our first apprehension of modern civilization ... emerges in the mind of the tourist". In modern days, tourism thereby is a prominent component of the process of globalisation through the evolving system of spaces and flows (Castells 1996 and Williams and Lew 2014).

The concept of the Anthropocene has recently come to represent a substantial focus of critical discussion in many different scientific disciplines. In the social sciences tourism captures how human action reaches planetary scales in terms of impacts and change (see e.g. Castree 2014a, Braun 2015, Cook et al. 2015, Lorimer 2015 and Gren and Huijbens 2016). The term has acquired a popular meaning, deployed in different scientific communities, including the humanities; as well as in the scientific literature, discussions and the public media.

The Anthropocene is a proposed geological Epoch dating from the time that a significant human impact began to be exerted on the Earth's geology and ecosystems (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000, Crutzen, 2002 and 2006, Rockstrom and Klum

2012 and Castree 2014b). Lewis and Maslin (2015) hypothesised an onset for the Anthropocene dating back to around 1610 – a date chosen as marking the low-point for a decrease in atmospheric CO₂ measured in the Antarctic ice cores that lasted for around 100 years. That change in the atmosphere has come to be associated with the tragic deaths of over 50 million indigenous inhabitants of the Americas following their exposure to diseases and colonial violence carried there by Europeans in the 15th century. The Industrial Revolution, with its onset in the late 1700s in association with the ever-wider use of fossil fuels, has also been proposed as a base period for the Anthropocene (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000 and Crutzen 2002) while other scientists propose the more-marked and widespread transformation that followed in the 19th century, with the impact on global atmospheric CO₂ concentrations (Wolfe et al. 2013 and Snowball et al. 2014). Some therefore favour a more abrupt and far later tipping point into the Anthropocene complete with a potential stratigraphic marker. This is dated to 16 July 1945 and reflects the first test of the atomic bomb at Alamogordo, New Mexico (Zalasiewicz et al. 2015). The isotopic products of that bomb-testing do indeed provide a globally distinctive marker horizon in geological strata. A base for the Anthropocene close to the middle of the 20th century has its logical justifications, in that it also coincides with what Steffen et al. (2007) label the Great Acceleration (~1950), representing the post-war expansion in the human population, large changes in natural processes, and the development and use of artificial materials such as plastics (Waters and Zalasiewicz 2018 and Zalasiewicz et al. 2019).

Only recently has the Anthropocene become a subject of tourism-specific study (see Gren and Huijbens 2014 and 2016 and Moore 2015), with the concept finding its way into tourism research (Hall and Saarinen 2011), as well as articles on the ecosystem impacts (Fuentes 2010). In a first foray into the discussion, Gren and Huijbens asserted that “tourism policy and practice in the Anthropocene ... implies that tourism needs to be measured up in specific relation to the boundaries and limits vis-à-vis the Earth and humanity at the global scale” (Gren and Huijbens 2014, p. 12). “In Anthropocene understanding, modern tourism is a geophysical force which has contributed to the reshaping of the Earth for human purposes, and to climate change” (Gren and Huijbens 2014, p. 4), and is seen as epitomised by international aviation and related intimately to climate change (Hares et al. 2010 and Gössling et al. 2011). Thus, seen through the prism of the Anthropocene, modern tourism is a geophysical force contribution to a reshaping of the Earth for human purposes, as well as climate change which have at best appeared de-territorialised, as nature, landscapes and destinations to be taken care of through the generic concepts of conservation and sustainability (Gren and Huijbens 2014).

THE SHAPING AND MODIFICATION OF SPACE BY TOURISM IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

Tourism has a markedly spatial dimension (Urry 2002 and Hall 2005). Like many branches of the economy, it tends to select locations most favourable to it – with a clear concentration; and it is highly diversified in terms of functioning. Like every field, it makes use of – but also transforms – elements already in existence, while influencing the emergence of new ones. Tourism develops where there is something of interest to its practitioners, i.e. tourists and providers, but also simply where tourists actually go. The intensity of tourist visitation differs from place to place, with the result that the development of tourism has positive and negative

impacts; while different places and societies account for differing shares of the phenomenon.

In terms of reshaping the Earth for human purposes, tourism on the one hand, consumes many goods and transforms space into destinations for tourists; while on the other participation in tourism also leaves its trace – not least the carbon footprint that arises as journeys are taken. Equally, tourism is not a homogeneous activity, given that different types of visitors generate contrasting demands, and disparate impacts on resources and space (Butler 1980). The impact of tourism on the environment is a very broad one, not least as tourists are associated with pollution, especially of water and air. Visible water pollutants (sewage, organic and inorganic wastes, fuel oil from boats, and many more kinds) accumulate in still waters and are routinely deposited by wave action onto beaches and shorelines (Williams and Lew 2014, p. 113). However, tourism is also responsible for air pollution, and less obviously for noise pollution. Since about the mid-1990s, a significant concern has reflected global warming and the contributions that emissions of greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide (CO₂) contribute to this problem. The rising levels of air traffic to which tourism is a major contributor have been identified as a particular emerging and serious problem.

Tourism space may be determined on the basis of what characterises tourism, and thus be understood in terms of areas in which tourism products and services are created, distributed and consumed (Więckowski 2014). The creators and administrators of space also change, as do tourists (they are mobile), whereas ‘territory’ remains in the same place (being immobile). While many factors impact the transformations with which tourism is irrevocably associated, the most important are demographic and social factors (numbers of people and their ages, free time, seasonality and life cycle, lifestyle and fashion), increased earnings, improvements in transport and communications, and changes of a political nature (e.g. changes of function of borders, opening-up and integration). Recognised as the main causes of transformations in tourism are globalisation (Cacomo and Solonandrasana 2001), the rapid diffusion of innovation (technology) and changes in traditional tourism (as regards both distribution and functioning). The operation of tourism is also much influenced by features of the economy and changes therein. While the changes are not especially sudden, and do not occur to the same extent in all countries – or even across the whole of society within any given country – they do have major consequences for areas receiving tourists. The “constant change would seem to be a feature of most tourist destinations, not least as the creation and development of spaces for tourism are seen to reflect wider political, economic and social processes often driven non-locally, if manifesting themselves very locally indeed” (Więckowski and Saarinen 2019, p. 370). Mobile societies also appear and undergo a strengthening of their roles. The development of tourist space is now more and more subject to pressure exerted by tourists (their journeys, fashions and expectations), as well as their choices of alternative destinations and consequent influence on the loss of clients in certain given places. Also of significance to the development of space is individual activity on the part of people (the system of personality of the individual), society (the social system) and culture (the cultural system) – and this in areas of both emission and reception. Things also operate in this way because of the growing significance of tourists’ perceptions of their travel destinations, as shaped by everything from “old-fashioned” novels on journeys, or guide-books, through to virtual platforms such as are *TripAdvisor* abounding with

the comments of other tourists, official DMOs websites, and social-media platforms sharing opinion and visual material on destinations. In addition such perceptions are also very much shaped by the opinions of experts (Urry 2002).

Tourism resembles other spheres of human activity in occupying the places in geographical space most suited to it. Tourists are interested in both a primary (natural) space and that used by people – either in the past (historically and often in relation to another function) or now – in a place made over from what it was before or built entirely from scratch (as at some kind of theme park). However, each type of tourism (albeit with differing intensity) brings about change on the planet and leaves its Anthropocene traces. As it makes use of space, tourism may:

- occupy primary space, and as a primary function in comparison with other human activity;
- co-utilise space that also serves other functions (as in churches or town centres);
- through a process of segregation, extend support (if with a trend towards dominance) to places previously engaged in the servicing of other functions (e.g. industrial, residential, agricultural, etc.);
- occupy space once other functions have ended (not least ex-factories, and buildings once involved in the guarding of borders) – and under specific conditions using places that once served tourism, lost that function thanks to the operation of certain factors, but then returned once more to the original tourist function.

The excessive concentration of tourist traffic, known as “overtourism”, (the term used to describe the danger of excessive exploitation of natural resources) leads to over-crowding in attractive locations, over-advertising and commercialisation, which all work to a lower result in the degradation of natural and cultural resources. At the same time, however, concerns about tourism “overcrowding” in many areas provoked “tourism-phobia”, asserting that “growth is not the enemy; it is how we manage it” (UNWTO 2018, p. 5). An official definition also appeared, which reads: “the impact of tourism on a destination, or parts thereof, that excessively influences perceived quality of life of citizens and/or quality of visitors’ experiences in a negative way” (UNWTO 2018, p. 6). The presence of a huge tourists number visiting destinations has led to conflict with and complaints from residents concerned that such influxes rendered their homes impossible to live in. Later, the term *turismofobia* appeared to describe the reaction of Barcelona residents to the excessive growth of tourism (Milano 2017). The notion of “tourist saturation” was also used (Milano 2017). The discussion around overtourism brought attention to the negative consequences of the unchecked increase in the phenomenon (Kruczek 2019).

Nevertheless, the overall trend has long been for strong tourist demands to push forward both the development of tourist infrastructure and tourist traffic. This works to threaten the environment, and ushers in a need for management and decision-making made difficult by efforts to try and meet contradictory and/or mutually-exclusive expectations on the part of tourists and environmental and conservation circles. Tourism founded upon valuable features of the natural environment is especially vulnerable to the destruction of what lies at its heart, i.e. nature itself (Mathieson and Wall 1982). Excessive exploitation leads to nature of reduced quality, and indeed to the loss of at least some parts of it. Conflicts between the needs

of conservation and tourism are visible in a great many regions – and this in fact began as early as in the 19th century. Certain destinations may have deteriorated as a result, while certain new forms, activities, places and regions have evolved. More generally, “a need has arisen for a discussion and critical evaluation of governance, policy, planning, marketing, human mobilities and socio-economic dimensions as all linking up with the growing tourism industry, *inter alia* in the CEECs” (Więckowski and Saarinen 2019, p. 373).

NEW CHANGES AND CHALLENGES DURING AND AFTER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Recently, however, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us the global changes, and in some case a real sense to stop it (Gössling et al. 2020, Hall et al. 2020, Więckowski 2020, Kolosov et al. 2021 and Tiwari and Chowdhary 2021). It was tourism that became the first victim of the global pandemic, especially as a consequence of the parallel processes of border-closure, lockdown and quarantine, with tourist facilities simply closed *en masse* (Lew et al. 2020 and Więckowski 2020). Everything has changed. The global tourism industry has ground to a halt, and concern about overtourism has consequently been replaced by a newfound worry that “undertourism” (previously a marginal issue) will instead threaten the future of economies and societies worldwide. The scale and implications of the current tourism slowdown are staggering (Gössling et al. 2020, Tiwari and Chowdhary 2021 and Więckowski 2021). While a global pandemic may change tourism hugely but can necessarily having to do more to meet requirements on sustainability or climate-change mitigation (Hall et al. 2020 and Harvey 2020).

Possible degrowth calls more for a voluntary, planned contraction than the haphazard reaction the pandemic has forced upon us. COVID-19 will affect transport and accessibility more than tourism *per se*. Tourists could shorten the commute to holiday destinations or weekend trips. The tourism industry may continue to play a key role in sustaining, into the Anthropocene (Fletcher 2011 and 2019). This is not only because of the social unrest overtourism provokes, but also because of the damage – already beyond the sustainable (Agrawal 2003 and Ira and Matlovic 2020) – that the industry has been doing to the environment (via climate change, but also pollution more generally and resource depletion). Time will tell whether tourism will change due to the COVID pandemic; and if this is a short-term opportunity to change habits, or a more permanent trend (Higgins-Desbiolles 2020, Więckowski 2020 and Kolosov et al 2021). “In this respect, pandemics and their role in the Anthropocene represent subject-matter, not only for geography, but also for every socio-economic discipline. For geographers this will be an important field of study in the near future, and geographers will in fact find it impossible to stay away from this process” (Więckowski 2020).

CONCLUSIONS

The current (longer-term) intensification of tourism is one of the most visible social and economic changes affecting societies. At the same time, tourism has a significant impact on the development of space, with the space serving its needs proving readily-identifiable wherever it arises. Many traces induced by tourism can be detected globally, because tourism is part of the geophysical forces operating on the planetary scale. Through the travel behaviours of tourists, and associated car-

bon emissions and consumption of earthly resources, vulnerability has grown, with increased dependence on the fragile web of matter–energy transformations between themselves and the Earth (Barr et al. 2010 and Dickinson et al. 2010).

However, while tourism is a tool for pushing change, it also contributes to the destruction of socio-economic structures. Tourism can be harnessed as a force for progressive environmental social and political justice (Higgins-Desbiolles 2006 and 2018) and even transport justice (Ciechański 2021 and Ciechański et al. 2021).

With a view to encouraging reflection on tourism’s potentially reduced impact on the Earth, and hence its fate and role in the Anthropocene, some suggested priority areas of future research and needs could be as follows:

- new ideas for reorganisation, innovation and creativity as important elements for the human system to transform itself and adapt to the new context the planet (Lew et al. 2020) including e.g. better use of resources for improving quality of life (Murgaš and Petrovič 2020 and Kolosov et al. 2021),

- the issue of reorganisation and innovation in reducing tourism-related transport, especially by air and private car in particular as regards short-term travel and changes in tourist behaviour to be more sustainable (Więckowski 2020 and 2021 and Kolosov et al. 2021),

- new ideas of innovating planning, especially into the sustainable direction (economic, social and environmental); or – even better – financing what are actually de-touristification measures, in oversaturated spaces in particular (Higgins-Desbiolles 2020 and Lew et al. 2020). In the Anthropocene, tourism will most likely also continue to be a “meta-policy problem” (Scott et al. 2012, p. 373).

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PRIESTOROVÁ DIMENZIA CEĽOVNÉHO RUCHU V ANTROPOCÉNE

Cestovný ruch (turizmus) spôsobuje jednu z najviac viditeľných spoločenských a ekonomických zmien, ktoré ovplyvňujú spoločnosť a tiež našu planétu ako celok. Cestovný ruch má význačný vplyv na rozvoj priestoru, v ktorom dochádza k jeho realizácii. Prejavujú sa cestovného ruchu sú ľahko identifikovateľné, kdekoľvek sa objaví. Mnohé jeho dôsledky sú viditeľné na celom svete. Aktivity cestovného ruchu zanechávajú stále viac stôp, od transformácie lokalít (napr. vybudovaná infraštruktúra, zmenený reliéf, modifikovaná flóra a fauna, nárast množstva odpadu a jeho ukladanie), cez vplyv na podnebie a celú troposféru (napr. znečistenie ovzdušia a stopy CO₂ spôsobené dopravou), až po spotrebu zdrojov.

Antropocén (chápaný ako geologické obdobie, v ktorom človek začal svojou činnosťou intenzívnym spôsobom ovplyvňovať svet) sa iba v ostatnom období stal predmetom štúdií z oblasti cestovného ruchu, pričom tento koncept si postupne našiel svoje uplatnenie v rámci výskumu cestovného ruchu. Cestovný ruch môže naďalej zohrávať kľúčovú úlohu pri udržateľnom spoločensko-ekonomickom rozvoji sveta v antropocéne. Táto štúdia sa snaží ponúknuť kritický prehľad koncepčných väzieb medzi turizmom a antropocénom a prispieva do diskusie o význame cestovného ruchu v antropocéne. Z tohto je zrejmé, že hlavnou metódou pri zostavení tejto štúdie je systematický prehľad literatúry. Myšlienky vychádzajúce z relevantnej literatúry a doterajších diskusií sú doplnené o niektoré procesy, nové zmeny a výzvy, ktoré vznikli počas pandémie COVID-19. Autor sumarizuje nový spôsob myslenia vo svetle pandémie, ktorý by priniesol návrhy vhodné do postpandemických podmienok.



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