

Are we at the point of no return? Thoughts of global warming and climate change dominate the thoughts of younger generations across the globe, causing significant mental health problems for many (Matthew Taylor and Jessica Murray, 2020), (BMJ, 2020)(Katharine Lee, 2019)

We have lived through a period of huge economic expansion and globalisation; it is future generations who will suffer the consequences of unfettered global capitalism. Tourism provides a relevant and relatable example of the benefits and challenges facing industrial and post-industrial societies and gives concrete meaning to the term sustainability.

According to the office of statistics, there were 93.1 million visits overseas by UK residents in 2019, an increase that was reversed in 2020 by the SARS-COV2 pandemic - itself an example of how the consequences of globalisation can be negative as well as positive. 2020 has offered in sharp relief a glimpse of the double-edged sword tourism is. It is evident that the SARS-COV2 pandemic has shone a clear light on the consequences of our obsession with travel, with canal waters in Italy becoming clearer, beaches and popular holiday destinations cleaner and fresher. According to the Guardian, ‘While the pandemic has dealt travel a severe blow, some hope it can be an opportunity to introduce slower, fairer, more sustainable holidays’ (Jane Dunford, 2020). Like most other hospitality sectors, the cruise ships were shut down almost over night; they offer us a perfect illustration of the link between global epidemics, which are, after all just one form of pollution, and tourism. As de Bellaigue explains ‘Contagion at sea inspired a special horror, as pleasure palaces turned into prison hulks’ (Christopher de Bellaigue, 2020). And, of course, these ‘tourists’ were not wanted anywhere, condemned to stay at sea (Leah F. Moriarty, et al, 2020).

The danger of infectious diseases being transmitted globally via sea travel has been known since at least the 14th century (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). But the increase in numbers of cruise ships, sailing from port to port, is a relatively recent phenomenon. Every day a cruise ship docks into a port, disgorging vast numbers of tourists into a small space for a short amount of time, transmitting illness in times of plague, and causing pollution, arguably a much more serious long term ‘plague’, at other times. Cruise liners have experienced many years of a growing industry with a turnover in 2019 of £2.7 trillion. The cruise sector is arguably one of the top polluters within the tourism industry (Anon, 2020). During a recent trip to Malaysia, I saw first hand the devastating effects of cruise liners, with plastic rubbish scattered all across the region’s beaches, making one of the world’s untouched habitats cluttered with British, American and Chinese imperishable plastic products. With increasing pressure to address environmental concerns, the cruise industry has published several responses, and it is now possible to choose a ‘greener’ cruise by searching the The 2020 Cruise Ship Report Card (Darcy Alexander, 2020). We can look to the Royal Navy (RN) for best practice. In their sustainability policy they say:

International and UK environmental regulations and MOD internal policy all influence the design requirements for defence equipment and ships. Environmental assessments are carried out for all equipment during the procurement and build phases with the aim of removing or reducing impacts and risks (MOD, 2020). If we take the policies of the MOD and implement them into civilian cruise liners then the impact on the environment would be dramatically reduced. The RN use fully functional recycling centres, not only to reduce their carbon foot print, but also to assist in the fuelling of their engines; the newest ship within the fleet recently arriving in Portsmouth, HMS Tamar, is said to be the greenest ship since the times of sail.

TRAVELLING THE WORLD TO DEATH



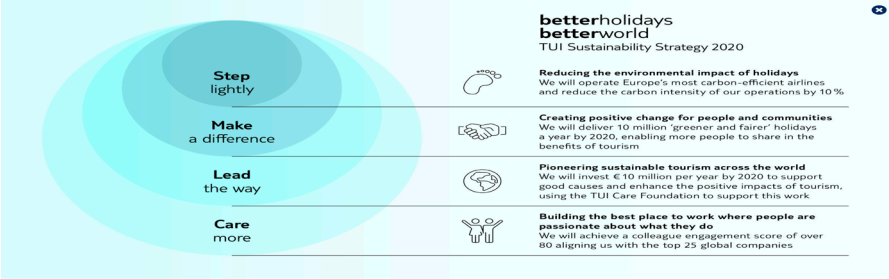
‘The ship is the first of her class to have a urea filter installed which will reduce damaging diesel exhaust emissions by about 90 per cent’ (Tom Cotterill, 2020). If we took these concepts from the RN and implemented them not only to the travel industry but to all cargo and oil ships then we could eliminate a huge amount of the pollution and carbon dumped into our oceans and atmosphere each day.



The damage caused by cruise ships does not, of course, stop once they pull into port. Cruise liners have a huge impact on the ports they visit with tonnes of waste at each port including sewage and unrecyclable waste. A passenger’s carbon footprint is significantly greater than that of other travellers. On top of the pollution caused by their exhaust fumes, cruise ships have been caught discarding trash, fuel, and sewage directly into the ocean (James Ellsmoor, 2019). Dubrovnik, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, had as many as 10 cruise ships a day, dropping off over 10,000 passengers a day. The historic town, with narrow streets, was constantly overcrowded, making life impossible for locals, forcing the local mayor to impose restrictions on the number of ships docking (Anon, 2020). This is a picture repeated across many historic cities, such as Barcelona, Venice, Santorini and Mallorca (Talia Lakritz, 2020).

Of course, towns and cities which have become used to the arrival of vast numbers of tourists from cruise ships are not the only locations for whom the pandemic has thrown the dilemmas of tourism into sharp relief. Other holiday destinations are similarly effected. Helen Cooke, Island Manger for TUI in the Balearics, says: ‘this industry has been devastated overnight, although, from a personal point of view, as a resident of Ibiza, it has been the best year for our children.’ Helen described the devastation the pandemic has had on the tourism industry with local job losses and an increase in crime. However, she goes on to say, it has given the travel industry an opportunity to look at the industry in a different way. Helen continued by talking about her summer off, which she had spent looking around the island, seeing how clean and beautiful it was. In previous years the towns were densely occupied by tourists and were ‘awful’, full of litter with drunken tourists spilling out of clubs, bars and restaurants. In 2020 these same restaurants and clubs were all boarded up. A situation which aptly summarises the contradictions of a tourist economy; it is founded on a double-edged sword. On one hand the holiday destinations are far cleaner, but there is nothing open. We live in a world that needs the tourist to sustain local economies, but the tourist destroys the very basis on which tourism is founded. Is there a way out of this conundrum? The tourist industry is itself attempting to find ways out of the dilemma.

Tui has developed a strategy that it hopes will address some of these fundamental problems: “Tui’s sustainable policy for 2015-2020 - Better Holidays, Better World”



As the world’s leading tourism business, TUI Group is committed to making our sector more sustainable. Our Better Holidays, Better World strategy is built around four core pillars. These are areas where we aim to make a positive impact to create change at scale – in our own operations, through our value chain and customers, and across the wider industry and beyond (TUI, 2020).

Tui are looking at increasing their contribution to sustainable tourism by reducing the carbon footprint of their airlines by 10%. They also intend to invest 10million euros into local sustainable economies. This all seems to be a great idea on paper, but we need to ask ourselves whether this is enough. Surely, serious businesses should be looking at a zero carbon footprint? Experts withing the fields of climate change argue that we have to act now; the tipping point is upon us and we cannot wait any longer to act. An article in Nature argues that ‘In our view, the consideration of tipping points helps to define that we are in a climate emergency and strengthens this year’s chorus of calls for urgent climate action — from schoolchildren to scientists, cities and countries’ (Timothy M. Lenton, et al, 2019). Indeed, it is not just experts, most of planet’s population are aware of the issues around sustainability, but feel constrained by the need for economic growth. Sustainable travel is simply one aspect of living sustainably on this planet, but it is an aspect that, with sufficient will, can be addressed. Limiting individual travel is one such solution, which would however also have a huge impact on economies, as well as reinforcing the political and philosophical issues around individual freedom that have become such a part of the response to the pandemic. Carbon allowances for travelling - carbon offsetting for individuals - could help overcome some of these issues. A scheme could be developed

whereby individuals could ‘earn’ credits from positive action, which they could then ‘spend’ on travel. Individuals could be allocated a global travel card that they would get stamped when travelling AND recycling. This would limit travel but avoid returning to the time when only the wealthy could travel. However, this would have to be a G20 or a global solution each. This sounds extreme; but perhaps our responses need to be extreme in order to counteract the extreme position we in. Responsible tourism - sustainable - respecting the environment, local cultures and local practices of our destinations is another option. It is one of the most obvious and apparently simple solutions: respecting others and their homes.



But we are all guilty of adopting the mindset of ‘I’m on holiday, I’ll do it when I get home’. This mindset is an irresponsible one. By changing our mind set and understanding the cultural and destinations fabrics then we start to understand the issues of local pollution and its downfalls. We don’t need to look far for an excellent example. During the lockdown of Italy, under the pandemic of SARS-COV2, the local area of Venice within 4 weeks of the lockdown saw canals that were so clear that you could physically see the bottom and the famous smells were all but gone. This is an excellent example that would never have been observed before COVID. Even if we cannot accept limits to our ‘right’ to travel, could we accept limits to tourism in specific locations? Spreading the tourism would reduce the impact on one destination, thereby boosting the economy of a region more generally, rather than that of the usual hotspots. Tourism companies could be rewarded with regional tax breaks for their contributions to “spreading the love of tourism”. Carbon offsetting could also be used more widely within the industry itself. The more carbon efficient companies could then offer discounts - making them more attractive to customers. Balancing the economic needs of local communities and the need for a sustainable way of living to ensure a future for all is as complex as a Rubik’s Cube. Each adjustment in one direction will impact on another; for a global problem, there needs to be an integrated approach. As Mark Carney, ex Governor of the Bank of England, has argued ‘we cannot self isolate from climate change’ (Victoria Gill, 2020).

There is a strong argument that the social and environmental costs of a business enterprise should be an important part of their balance sheet (R. Macve, 2020). Given the role that tourism plays in so many lives, surely it is an industry that should strive to incorporate the social and environmental costs into its balance sheets and to make these transparent and easily available. In this way, responsible decisions can be made. The research shows that change needs to happen but there is no one answer. The only solution is a multi-faceted approach as dynamic as our climate itself.



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