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With reference to the article by Mackenzie and Goodnow critically discuss the following statement: Microadventures are “an enticing alternative for both current and post-pandemic conditions” (Mackenzie and Goodnow, 2020, p1).

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By Joseph Barthorpe

Microadventures are certainly an effective moral and ethical alternative for adventure during current and post pandemic conditions. Although, because of these conditions, ethics of tourism and quality of life have been negatively affected due to the increase of people “forced to embrace locavist approaches to adventure” (Mackenzie & Goodnow, 2020, p.2); therefore, not producing the same extent of liminality that a pre-pandemic adventure would have had. Alastair Humphreys shows that microadventures facilitate the same feelings in which a pre-pandemic adventure would have. I believe that the concept of microadventures is more challenging to achieve liminality unless you are already an experienced/interested adventurer such as himself. In this essay I am going to explore how both microadventures and pre-pandemic adventures should be kept separate and that microadventures should not be used as an alternative, but encouraged to be continued in current similar, situational events.

The term Microadventure was created by Alastair Humphreys. As he began a family, “he replaced his longer and more remote adventures, with smaller, close to home, family friendly microadventures” (Mackenzie & Goodnow, 2020, p.3). These microadventures are created to appeal to everyone, including non-regular adventurers in order to get that refreshing escape feeling of liminality and freedom. The adventure travel industry is growing exponentially, forecast to grow “a further 33% by 2023 from its initial 195% between 2010 to 2014” (Allied Market Research, 2018; WTO, 2014). However due to this constant growth in the adventure travel industry, the current global pandemic has taken a devastating effect worldwide as “91% of the global population has suffered from movement restrictions, ranging from strict to more laissez-faire approaches” (Pew Research, 2020). Alastair Humphreys states that microadventures help people to escape from our urbanised lives without the need for abroad skiing trips and log cabins, just by searching for adventure from our doorsteps. This actively demonstrates that people with both experience and no experience can achieve excitement and escapism through the challenging, yet rewarding microadventures. Although achievable, I believe that microadventures only sustain to that matter if they undertake in a current/similar restrictive pandemic state. I am of the opinion that pre-pandemic adventures should not be mutually exclusive with microadventures referring to an alternative, but instead a situational adventure including forced ‘hyperlocal’ events.

Due to lockdown restrictions continuing, microadventures have been increasing since the start of the pandemic. Although this could argue that post pandemic adventures could work as an alternative to pre pandemic adventures, I believe that they won’t benefit peoples self morale once in a post-pandemic state, as ‘people love to travel’. In this current pandemic situation microadventures are not a choice in terms of adventure, but instead an only option, therefore once the restrictions deplete, everyone will want to adventure outside their current locavist areas and see the world again. The current adventure industry has suffered drastically as “air transport turnover fell 89% year on year to December 2020, travel agent and tour operator

turnover fell by 86%, and accommodation turnover was down 73%” (Ian Taylor, 2021). This actively demonstrates that in a post-pandemic state, microadventures would definitely not be able to support the adventure travel industry on an economic level as smaller, close to home adventures can’t support the tourism sites that completely rely on tourism across the globe. Countries that have less restrictions/free from COVID-19 have stated that they “have seen creative microadventures flourishing” (Mackensie & Goodnow, 2020, p.4), e.g. New Zealand. Nevertheless, I think that this is solely dependent on the fact that they are unavailable to travel outside the country. Without global travel, people are forced to embrace the environment around them, making the best with what they’ve got. This further intensifies my viewpoint that people in current pandemic-induced situations will not want to continue with microadventures, but have the need and want to regain that sense of freedom and liminality through adventurous travel on an utmost scale.

The pandemic has given the opportunity for more people to embrace microadventures whilst still working with the restrictions made from COVID-19, however the “busiest ever visitor day in living memory” at Snowdonia National Park was recorded in 2020. According to the National Park, “significant crowding on the mountain summits and trails [made] it impossible to maintain effective social distancing” (BBC, 2020). These unsupporting pandemic activities could have potentially caused “devastational effects for rural healthcare facilities” (Mackensie & Goodnow, 2020, p.4). The gathering at Snowdonia was a wake up call for governmental bodies and healthcare facilities as the event clearly showed a struggling public searching for a higher sense of freedom and liminality from the current pandemic restrictions. I believe that microadventures have introduced a substitute for travel adventure during the current pandemic, however will no longer be deemed as useful once adventure travel can begin again starting from the 21st of June. Furthermore, it is also worth noting that “1 in 10 jobs around the world are in the tourism industry, equalling at 330 million jobs” (Sbai, 2020, p1). Without the ever growing scale of adventure tourism, the industry would take a devastating effect that may cause continuous impediments. Although microadventures have multiple positive effects environmentally, it simply would not be able to withhold itself on an economic scale, and I believe that the economic growth will incline exponentially following post-pandemic ethics, due to the current emotional wellbeing caused by the current pandemic restrictions. I do believe that “in the age of COVID-19, many people will reprioritise how they spend their time, money, psychic energy, and efforts” (Mackensie & Goodnow, 2020, p.6), however the particular reason for this circumstance won’t be to explore deeper in to their local explorations, but to find liminality in making every day count.

The age of COVID-19 has had an increasingly positive effect on global carbon dioxide emissions due to the lack of transport being able to burn fossil fuels because of pandemic restrictions. The 2020s annual decline is the “largest absolute drop in emissions ever recorded, and the largest relative fall since the second world war” (Mcsweeney & Tandon, 2020, p1). From the start of the pandemics lockdown to now, people have had to adapt to staying at home with minimal movement and engagement with their pre-pandemic routines. This has resulted in “overall lower income levels necessary for traditional adventure travel” (Mackensie & Goodnow, 2020, p.6), which may continue the decline in CO₂ emissions. However, the peak decrease in emissions in 2020 occurred in the first half of April, which was when lockdown measures were

at their most comprehensive. At that point, “daily global fossil CO₂ emissions were around 17% below their average 2019 levels” (Mcsweeney & Tandon, 2020, p1). I believe the gradient’s decline will become more acute as many people around the globe will still have travelling abroad prioritised in their minds once in a post-pandemic situation. The low availability of adventure travel around the world has created a temporary reduction in CO₂ emissions on a daily basis because of the pandemics forced confinement. The emphasis on the word ‘temporary’ works adjacent to ‘microadventures’ being an “enticing alternative” to pre-pandemic adventures, as both justify each other working most successfully during COVID-19 and becoming less of an impact once in a post-pandemic stage. Without people being forced to embrace a locavist lifestyle, microadventures would not have become a necessity. This actively demonstrates that everyday wellbeing wouldn’t be questioned to the same extent that it has due to the current global situation. Instead the green space would slowly increase back to its average as people go back to their traditional adventure travel lifestyle.

Alastair Humphreys emphasizes that a “microadventure is exactly the same as an adventure” capturing the same rewarding feeling and effect of escapism for both a “normal person and adventurer”. I believe that microadventures again only flourish during current pandemic situations, and Humphreys is a great example on how microadventures can be harder to achieve successfully unless you are a seasoned adventurer such as himself. Humphreys has previous experience and interests for the outdoors, whether it be local or halfway across the world, giving him a greater appreciation for the more locavist approach to adventure. A “normal person” may approach this differently, as a holiday outside their own country may give them that boost of liminality and a higher quality of life, due to simply being further away from home. Therefore I do not think that microadventures are capable of providing this feeling on a long term basis, as local areas can only provide ‘so much’ when it comes to escapism.

To summarise, I believe that microadventures are not an enticing alternative for both current and post-pandemic adventures. Although “we can enhance well-being and reduce environmental impacts” (Mackensie & Goodnow, 2020, p.6), in a post-pandemic world microadventures will not sustain the planet’s wellbeing and search for liminality. The adventure tourism industry would suffer a devastating effect if it were to be prioritised, and well-being/mental health would deplete for workers in the industry as well as non experienced adventurers. Although environmentally the temporary reduction in CO₂ emissions shows wildly positive effects, economically the post-pandemic world would not be able to cope with this moral and ethical ‘alternative’. I do, however, believe that microadventures can continue to work as a substitute for adventure travel, but only as a situational adaptation in a similar locavist circumstance.

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