INTRODUCTION: THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON CULTURAL TOURISM

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The coronavirus pandemic (SARS-CoV-2) has been disastrous for cultural tourism worldwide as many cultural tourist venues are concentrated in cities and have had to close along with tourism-related facilities such as hospitality businesses and hotels. There has been a widespread fear of travel and social contact. The comparative research drawn upon in this article suggests that new trends might be emerging with rural and natural attractions becoming more prominent and a rise in domestic tourism due to the problems of foreign travel. This is associated with increased use of individualized travel and self-catering facilities. There has been a resultant rediscovery of more local scenery and attractions. The greater use of information technology can enhance tourism under these conditions and this is likely a permanent shift. Our research shows how these shifts emerged over the course of different lockdowns. Comparative research suggests that new trends and directions might emerge instead of a postpandemic reset to what existed before.

Key words: COVID-19; Cultural tourism; Pandemic; Digital tourism

Introduction

This article aims to set out how the coronavirus pandemic affected cultural tourism. While indicating trends across the world, examples will be drawn mainly from Europe and the EU-funded SPOT cultural tourism project (Social and Innovative Platform on Cultural Tourism and its Potential for Deepening Europeanisation; http://www.spotprojecth2020.eu/) and from the articles submitted for this special issue of *Tourism, Culture & Communication* on COVID-19 and Cultural Tourism. While the pandemic was generally disastrous for cultural tourism, there were examples of new trends emerging and new styles of tourism, which will be explored, including the increasing role of digital technology. There has been little empirical research carried out due to pandemic restrictions, and there has been almost no comparative research about the impact of the pandemic on cultural tourism. This article corrects this bias by drawing upon data from a comparative research project of 14 European countries plus Israel. The project, which began shortly before the lockdowns started, was uniquely positioned to collect this information on a comparative basis.

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The coronavirus pandemic has had a devastating impact on the tourist industry. Governments responded from March 2020 with draconian "lockdowns," although the timing and stringency of these regulations varied from country to country. There were nevertheless similarities in the responses across countries, with face mask wearing compulsory or encouraged, "social distancing" involving leaving a space between people, as well as the use of sanitation measures such as hand sanitizers and increased cleaning along with avoidance of touching surfaces. Mass events such as festivals, concerts, and exhibitions associated with cultural tourism were banned or strictly curtailed. Traveling became very difficult, especially international travel.

The academic literature on tourism has not yet caught up with these events because of the time lags involved in publication and because many conferences and meetings (where ideas are normally exchanged and tested) have not taken place. Below we review a selection of the literature in tourism journals.

Literature Review

The literature on the impact of COVID-19 is still emerging as it was difficult to carry out empirical research during the pandemic period. A special issue of *Tourism Geographies* collected several articles in 2020, most of them conceptual in nature. The general thrust was that this was an opportunity to change the direction of tourism in more sustainable ways—for example, by encouraging "green tourism" (Ioannides & Gyimóthy, 2020). The question is whether these speculations were simply utopian or if there has been a change in thinking about cultural tourism postpandemic? Some suggest that there will simply be a reversion to the past as hospitality providers are hoping for a return to pre-COVID-19 days as soon as possible (Liu et al., 2021). Most governments have tried to prop up the tourism and hospitality industries through financial support, which has been important for the survival of tourism businesses (Salem et al., 2021).

Tourism and hospitality were some of the worst affected industries after governmental responses to the pandemic curtailed international travel, and initially, even domestic travel was discouraged or forbidden. The hospitality sector, including restaurants and hotels, was forced to close and industry businesses began to lay off staff. When businesses reopened, new hygiene measures were required with tables set further apart, rooms needed to air for a day before being reoccupied, and additional cleaning carried out after each guest. This required more staff effort at the same time as fewer visitors were allowed, creating a squeeze on resources. Many of these tourist businesses are small and this caused particular distress as they had few resources to draw upon as the lockdown cut into the tourist season in the spring and early summer of 2020 (Crespí-Cladera et al., 2021). If a member of staff tested positive for COVID-19 the whole establishment was forced to close while staff isolated. For this reason, many establishments went out of business and never reopened.

The first lockdown in the spring of 2020 was the most draconian and an easing of restrictions took place from May 2020 but still with social distancing, hygienic measures, and limits on international travel. After a brief season in 2020, a further lockdown followed in the autumn and winter of 2020 as virus cases spiked once more in the cold weather, and following the spread of new variants, further lockdowns followed (Lilleker et al., 2021). Although lockdowns were eased once more in the summer of 2021, international travel was still difficult and hygienic measures were still in place. This was followed in the winter of 2021 by a third wave of COVID-19, exacerbated by the spread of the highly infectious Omicron variant. However, by this time vaccination programs were in place with many people in Europe having received up to three vaccinations, which extended to four in Israel.

However, there were important variations across Europe in this respect. Eastern Europe escaped much of the first wave of the pandemic, while Spain and Italy were the most affected at that time. However, Eastern European countries were the most badly affected with the second and third waves. Although the vaccination program should have provided some immunity from COVID-19, there was a simultaneous rise in antivaccine resistance, especially in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Eastern Europe. Even after the EU had approved the use of vaccines, take-up was particularly low in Eastern Europe, most likely reflecting the lack of trust in government (Eurofound, 2021). In looking

ahead, this is likely to inhibit the recovery of the tourism industry there. This means that those countries are likely to be more vulnerable to more recent and future waves of COVID-19. In addition to the distrust in government fueling antivaccine resistance, research by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions suggests that the degree of vaccine hesitancy is related to how much people receive their news from social media (Eurofound, 2021).

The result of these "stop and start" policies was a rise in anxiety in general across the world accompanied by increasing anxiety about contact with others, especially strangers, in public spaces, which influenced decisions to travel. People were increasingly anxious about flights and other cancellations and reimbursements as well as levels of safety and hygiene at their destinations (Piccinelli et al., 2021; Qiu et al., 2020). Zenker et al. (2021) term this "coronaphobia." This made people reluctant to travel very far even with the easing of restrictions and changed travel behavior. Even if they were able to travel, the effort of testing and getting the right documentation resulted in travel burnout (Yousaf, 2021). Social media often inflamed anxieties in addition to providing the fast flow of information (Zheng et al., 2020) Added to this was increasing xenophobia towards foreigners who were perceived as bringing the threat of disease, and especially Chinese people were wrongfully targeted (Kock et al., 2020).

After showing increased growth over several decades, international tourism dwindled away under the restrictions imposed by the pandemic. This had various effects on different world regions. Data collected by the World Tourist Organization (UNTWO) (https://www.unwto.org/tourism-data/international-tourism-and-covid-19; accessed December, 2021) showed a drop in international tourist arrivals by 73% in 2020 and by 76% in 2021. The same source showed that in Europe as a whole, the drop was 69% in both years, with Northern Europe the most affected, showing a drop of 86% and 60% in Southern Europe. Countries and regions were affected by how much they relied upon this source of revenue—for example, Macao in China depends on international tourism for 48% of its GDP. In Spain, this is 12%, in Croatia 11%, and Montenegro 10%. These countries were among the worst hit in the world.

Although the UNTWO collects data about the general picture of cultural tourism we are still lacking information about what actually happened on the ground. Here we can turn to the evidence provided by our SPOT partners in a series of reports and in some of the articles presented here. A few articles suggested new directions for tourism in the future. For example, a renewed appreciation of nature and trail hiking was a possible direction for some. This could be done safely outdoors whilst maintaining social distancing providing positive mental health benefits (Buckley & Westaway, 2020) and a number of researchers pointed to the importance of a more green and sustainable tourism in the future (Ioannides & Gyimóthy, 2020). Our research suggested some other notable directions in tourism as we shall see below.

Methodology

The research is primarily based on data collected for the EU-funded SPOT project on cultural tourism. The SPOT project was mainly concerned with particular case study areas, most of them being more rural or postindustrial areas, which had not hitherto been the focus for cultural tourism. In Scotland, we were concerned with media tourism in two rural areas: Doune and Abbottsford. In the Netherlands it was the windmill park at Kinderdijk, in Greece a focus on the Cyclades Islands, in Slovenia the City of Ljubljana, in the Czech Republic South Moravia, in Slovakia the area of Nitra, in Italy the focus was on the literary park in Piedmont, in Hungary the cross-border area with Slovakia around Komáron, and in Estonia a similar border area of Ida-Verumaa near to Russia. In Germany, the underexplored region of Lusatia in the East was the focus and in Poland the castles and gardens around Silesia. In Austria, the postindustrial Iron Route was set up in Styria, and in Romania the Buzău region of the Carpathian mountains. In Israel the cultural tourism potential of the Be'it Shean Valley was explored and in Spain, Barcelona as a contrasting overtouristed area was the subject of study.

In each of these case studies, an analysis of policies prior to the coronavirus pandemic and then during the pandemic was carried out along with roundtables and interviews with key stakeholders. In addition a survey of local businesses, visitors,

and residents was carried out in the summer of 2020 (in 2021 in Scotland due to lockdown restrictions), which were analyzed separately. Initial publications of some of the results can be found in a special issue of the journal *Sustainability* in 2022 (Special Issue European Perspectives on Cultural Heritage as a Driver for Sustainable Development and Regional Resilience).

Collecting data was particularly difficult during the lockdowns when there were few visitors, businesses were closed, and face-to-face data collection was restricted. This is reflected in the research strategies of some of the contributors to this Special Issue, who focused on tourist agencies and operators or tried to undertake online surveys for some or part of the research. The problem with online surveys is that they are not necessarily representative and may not cover microbusinesses, which might be difficult to identify and contact. Furthermore, we found that our surveys were attacked several times by bots, despite security arrangements set up through the University. Notwithstanding these problems, we can present some early results here. Many of our examples are drawn from the results of this project but also from our own experiences in Scotland as well as contributors to this Special Issue on COVID-19 and Cultural Tourism.

Cultural Tourism and COVID in Comparison

Cultural tourism is particularly badly affected by these trends because cultural institutions are more often found in cities and involve visits to indoor institutions, where visits were restricted. Many cultural monuments closed altogether during the pandemic and, when they reopened, these institutions operated a prebooking system to restrict the number of visitors. This required a certain amount of planning and curtailed the more spontaneous forms of visiting. Cultural tourist attractions such as museums, castles, and monuments in Scotland especially missed the American and Canadian visitors who had spent more money and tended to stay for longer.

By looking at the situation comparatively, we can identify some key trends: first, the economic impact in different parts of Europe and how far it was mitigated; second, the focus on domestic tourism and localism; third the increasing importance of nature and rural locations; and fourth the enhanced role of digital technology in shaping—and at times replacing—physical travel.

Varying Economic Impacts and Varying Government Support

The economic effects of the lockdowns during 2020 and 2021 were variable. Countries such as Greece and other Southern European destinations that relied heavily on tourism were badly affected. Conference and business travel especially disappeared. Within countries there was a redistribution between areas as those urban and other areas that had relied heavily on tourism in Austria and in the Czech Republic were badly hit. Still, other areas such as rural ones or ones that were able to benefit from more domestic tourism were less badly hit. Some more rural areas even benefited from the rise in domestic tourism and people trying to escape contagion.

Places that could offer more individualized and customized staycations in the form of villas or self-catering accommodation could benefit from these trends and there was a rise in these kinds of offerings. Across all countries, these kinds of customized travel involving private cars or small, couple, individual or family groups rather than large groups became more common (see Ghosh and Batabyal, and Šťastná et al., this issue). Many businesses diversified, offering home delivery of food or other services altogether in order to stay afloat (see Sofer et al., this issue). Providing local food delivery through websites became more common. The move to online offerings and orders is something we address below.

The reduced visitor numbers were welcomed by some tourists who embraced the "tranquility" that this offered (Richards and Fernandes, this issue) and the increased space to enjoy cultural offerings without crowding. The advance booking introduced by many businesses provided a way of better managing tourist flows (Gali et al., this issue). Cities such as Barcelona enjoyed relief from the overtourism that had caused tensions in local communities causing spiraling rental prices, litter, crowding, and noise, which had threatened the inhabitants' quality of life for some years (see Bishop et al., this issue). Some places saw this as a way of reducing the

numbers but raising the quality of the visitors and the cultural offerings. For example, in Barcelona the city tried to attract "digital nomads" by offering them accommodation, access to cultural offerings, and deals on transport even if they remained only for "workations." Some southern European countries such as Greece and Spain offered "COVID free" islands where life could continue as normal (Terkenli and Georgoula, this issue).

Scotland relies on tourism for its revenue and employment to a greater extent than other parts of the UK and 2020 was going to bring in a new set of tourist initiatives—until the pandemic stopped all that (O'Connor, 2021; VisitScotland/STERG, 2021). Surveys conducted by VisitScotland, the national Scottish tourism agency, over the pandemic showed that most of the industry entrepreneurs were small businesses that were either proprietor run or with less than 10 employees. Scottish Enterprise, representing local businesses, challenged the government and pointed to the impracticalities of opening during the COVID-19 climate. One quarter had run out of cash reserves by 2021, 35% reported that the business did worse than expected, and 19% of businesses did not reopen during 2021. Most businesses reported a drop in turnover in 2020 compared with 2019. Businesses in Edinburgh and Glasgow were the worst affected as people fled the cities and rural providers had the highest numbers of visitors. Three quarters of businesses reduced staff numbers, by putting people on furlough or not employing staff that they normally would, and over one third had to make redundancies. According to VisitScotland, one quarter of businesses considered selling their business or key assets (VisitScotland/STERG, 2021). However, similar surveys by Highlands and Islands Enterprise in Scotland found that most businesses envisaged continued trading, at a reduced rate. It is clear that the pandemic had a particularly severe impact on small, medium, and microenterprises. Many of these are in the tourism and hospitality industries in rural Scotland (Garrison & Wallace, 2021).

The government offered business support in the form of loans and support for employment through furloughs or subsidies to businesses to lay off employees temporarily. While these subsidies were much appreciated by the businesses we interviewed in 2021, a survey in the Highlands

and Islands of Scotland indicated that 60% were not eligible for government support (Highlands and Islands Enterprise [HIE], 2021). However, this reduction in capacity meant that when it was possible to open, many businesses were not able to do so. They could not recruit the staff (having laid off people) and these problems were compounded in the UK by Brexit. Many of the temporary, seasonal workers in the tourism and catering industries were recruited from Europe, but following Brexit, they now had to apply for work visas and pay for health insurance. The rumors about Brexit along with the feeling of hostility put these temporary workers off from returning to the UK. Across Europe, there were labor shortages as economies came out of lockdowns. Workers who had previously staffed tourist establishments demanded higher wages and were less mobile. In a public-facing industry, they were likely to be frequently off sick or required to isolate if they had come into contact with someone who was sick. In parts of the UK, wages for these kinds of workers rose threefold. Businesses learned to deliver services with a reduced staff (see Šťastná et al., this issue).

The additional measures necessary to run a business, including deep cleaning, reduced customers, the introduction of testing and tracing, erecting barriers between tables, and prebooking systems meant that costs of opening rose and many did not feel able to open at all under these circumstances. As a result, prices of accommodation and eateries rose across the sector. In other countries, the economic effects of the pandemic have also been detrimental. Israel in particular relies on international tourism and these numbers have declined dramatically. Greece is still suffering economic fragility after the 2008 financial crisis and its aftermath and relies greatly on tourism for balancing its economy (Sarantako & Terkenli, 2019). In other countries where tourism was not so developed (i.e., Estonia, Romania, Slovakia) the pandemic quashed plans to expand cultural tourism.

Governments found themselves on the horns of a dilemma between locking down to avoid the spread of the contagion and wanting to open up to support the economy. The brief advent of "eat out to help out" subsidies in the summer of 2020 for restaurants in the UK suggested the latter direction, and in Austria, the City of Vienna gave a voucher of

€50 per person to spend in restaurants. In Poland, a 500 PLN voucher was distributed for each child (although the promised voucher for seniors was never forthcoming) and in Spain young people were given €400 to spend on cultural activities. Some countries had few or no subsidies, as was the case in India (Ghosh and Batabyal, this issue) and Israel (Sofer et al., this issue). However, many of the trends identified were the same. Businesses were forced to innovate or go out of business. The positive side to this is that businesses often found ways of providing lower cost services, including digital ones and self-service solutions (see Sofer et al., this issue). For example, in the UK, diners were required to order and prepay online at eateries so that serving staff simply delivered their food. Older customers or those without smartphones might have found this difficult to adapt to.

In most countries, governments introduced plans to support the employment of workers to stop them from losing their jobs, although these took different forms in different places and support for tourist businesses. In wealthier European countries these took the form of national strategies generously supported, whereas poorer countries, particularly those in Eastern Europe, looked towards the EU Resilience and Recovery Plan or other EU redistributive support through Regional Development aid and the Cohesion policies. Businesses in Poland had yet to receive this money withheld by the EU in protest against the ruling government policies. While the partners in Romania, Greece, Italy, Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, Estonia, and Slovenia all mentioned this EU funding as essential, partners in Spain, the UK, the Netherlands, and Germany did not. This probably reflects the generous support measures that were already in place at a national level. Other countries mentioned turning to World Bank loans—this was the case in Romania. Some areas, such as Barcelona, offered tour guides and performers assistance to tide them over. Many countries used the mechanism of lowering or abolishing VAT for hospitality services.

Therefore, although the pandemic had a detrimental effect on tourism numbers and businesses, many of these were cushioned by government economic assistance to an extent that was unprecedented in peace times. While the EU recovery program was slower to get off the ground, this assistance marked a major redistribution of funds from wealthier to poorer countries within the EU and so Greece and Eastern Europe turned to these sources when their own governments were not in such a good position to support them. This had some unexpectedly positive economic effects, as we shall see later.

The Increasing Demand for Domestic Tourism

The lockdowns encouraged more domestic travel. Although domestic visitors are also more likely to be day-trippers and to spend less than international ones (Šťastná et al., this issue), other evidence suggests that domestic visitors were spending more than they used to—at least in some places (see Richards and Fernandes, this issue). Indeed, partners in the SPOT team reported that domestic visitors' number of nights stayed increased during the pandemic, perhaps because they were unable to travel elsewhere. Several countries made attracting domestic tourism part of their policy. In both Hungary and Slovenia, the nationalist governments prioritized national tourists and developed cultural facilities to encourage national pride or educate people about their history. In Slovenia this took the form of opening a museum on the Independence of Slovenia from the Former Yugoslavia.

In Barcelona there was a call to develop "proximity tourism" (which included visitors from neighboring France) and in the Netherlands this went under the slogan "You should be here." In the Netherlands alternatives such as photography courses and river cruises were developed for people wanting to holiday nearer home. In the Czech Republic alternative holidays involving self-catering and car driving were encouraged with a "holidays in the Czech Republic" policy. In Slovakia, it was observed that 79% of holidays involved traveling around Slovakia and in Scotland 80% of holiday makers were UK nationals (in contrast to the 50/50 split with international visitors recorded previously). In Romania, the slogan "Tourist in my country" was promoted. In Germany, most of the tourism is domestic anyway, but here the number of domestic tourists increased by an estimated 40% as Germans found it more difficult to go abroad. In Poland, a tourism voucher of 500 PLN was for children to encourage domestic use of hospitality facilities. Where visitors did not come from the

same country, they came from nearby ones as was the case in Austria and the Czech Republic (see Sandreister et al. and Šťastná et al., this issue).

The lockdowns encouraged a sense of community self-help but also exacerbated a process of "othering" whereby strangers, including visitors, were not welcome and a source of anxiety (Dalton, 2020). In many rural tourist areas in Scotland, the influx of visitors from elsewhere in the UK was treated with hostility because they were seen as potentially overloading the limited rural healthcare facilities. They were also treated with antipathy because of apparent bad behavior in the form of partying, littering, and defecating in public places (mainly because public toilet facilities were closed) ("Villages around," 2020). "Wild camping" increased with problems of littering and trespassing. The wave of what were seen as barbarian invasions from urban areas bringing disease reversed the usual welcome extended to visitors. We could term this "antitourism." In Scotland, this occasionally took the form of anti-English sentiments as the number of English visitors increased. At one point the Isle of Skye was closed to visitors because they felt there were too many people (Mclean, 2020).

Once lockdown restrictions started to be relaxed for the first time in the summer of 2020, new forms of recreation started to emerge. Unable to travel abroad, people opted for "staycations" in their own country. However, hotels and catering establishments had restricted capacity due to the new hygiene rules and many cultural monuments and venues remained closed or introduced a prebooking system to restrict numbers. This meant that even domestic available facilities could not meet the increased demand. Holiday travelers were pushed towards campsites and campervans and domestic bookings on UK campsites rose by 300% even as international travel fell and demand for campervans and caravans rose by 209% (Coffey, 2021). This kind of self-catering accommodation was also considered safer by visitors.

Airbnb, a digital platform in the sharing economy whereby people can rent out spare rooms and other accommodation, was at first significantly hit by a 72% drop in bookings from March–April 2020. However, after those bookings recovered as Airbnb offered the opportunity for self-catering accommodation and long-term lets in the countryside

(Baidin, 2021; Krouk & Almeida, 2020). The popularity of the countryside rose as people were able to work remotely and avoid COVID-19 hotspots in cities so that Airbnb bookings for "glamping" and self-catering accommodation overtook conventional hotels (Bresciani et al., 2021). The North coast 500 route in Scotland, a motoring route round the Highlands, became particularly popular for campers, camper vans, and mobile homes, putting further pressure on narrow, crowded roads with limited facilities—even under normal conditions. Hence, while international visitors declined, there was an increasing tendency to holiday nearer home and this was even encouraged by government campaigns to boost tourism safely. Therefore, although there was still a drop in tourist numbers, it was perhaps not as drastic as it might have been.

The Role of Nature and Rural Locations

Throughout Europe tourism in cities fell but tourism to rural areas became more popular. Rural areas were seen as more remote and easier to isolate oneself from others. Many people descended on beauty spots, leading to resentment by local populations and the idea of localism became more prevalent (Brouder, 2020). Many people forced to stay at home started exploring their locality and the natural environment around them. This resulted in new forms of leisure or the reinvigoration of more traditional forms that could be pursued safely in the countryside. For example, in the UK "wild swimming" in seas and lakes took off. All over Europe, the attraction of nature trails and hiking became more evident (Buckley & Westaway, 2020). In Nitra, Slovakia the aim was to reconstruct tourism after the pandemic by offering holidays in nature, based on these trends (see Kramáreková et al., this issue). This was helped by the fact that the COVID-19 restrictions were less strong for outdoor than for indoor venues, meaning more people could meet in safety. In several areas, cycle trails were opened and e-bikes made cycling more available for more people. Even in India, the rise in domestic tourism and entrepreneurial activities by travel agencies, who mostly organize tourism, led to interest in hiking holidays and safari parks (Ghosh and Batablyal, this issue).

In terms of cultural tourism, open-air venues started to hold more attraction than indoor ones,

because contagion was more difficult to spread there. This meant a switch to these kinds of cultural tourism sites including places such as the Valley of the Springs in Israel, which had previously been fairly marginal in terms of tourism. Šťastná et al. (this issue) and others argue that landscapes and natural environments should also be seen as "cultural tourism" and therefore there is a new appreciation of these kinds of places. However, Sandreister (this issue) and colleagues point out that some of these areas need to develop "unique selling potential" in order to make their attractions clear. Šťastná et al. also point out that the services offered in the countryside in terms of rest places, places to eat and to stay are often underdeveloped, requiring new investment.

Some places deliberately marketed themselves to attract the "digital nomads" for whom home working was now normal. Barcelona, for example, offered medical insurance, culture passes, and gym membership to attract these people. One of the reasons that Airbnb was successful is that it could offer these kinds of remote self-catering accommodation (Sigala, 2020). In the UK and Austria, this resulted in property prices in urban areas declining but rising in rural areas as people sought to escape from the urban areas now that they could continue to work from home.

Therefore, tourism moved out of the cities and into the countryside, using more individualized and self-contained forms of transport and accommodation. There was a new interest in leisure pursuits that could be carried out safely out of doors. This leads us to suggest that "cultural tourism" should also be seen as a rural and not just an urban phenomenon based on the built environment.

Digital Technology and Tourism

The pandemic rapidly accelerated the use of digital technologies (Kaczmarek et al., 2021). Work moved more online and people became used to using Zoom or equivalent web-based conference platforms for their work. In addition, they had to learn new digital skills for pursuing leisure as well. Online booking systems were introduced into many cultural tourism attractions to manage visitor numbers. QR codes were used to track and trace methodologies and of course for vaccination certification. COVID-19 vaccination, testing, and Green Pass certificates could be stored on mobile phones and increasingly became compulsory in many countries.

Consequently, new forms of digital tourism became more accessible, including what became known as e-tourism (Gretzel et al., 2020). Even wine tasting could be carried out as a virtual tour under COVID-19 conditions (Wen & Leung, 2021) and wine tasting events could be a source of revenue for unemployed tour guides using one of the communications platforms such as Zoom or Teams, among others. Jarratt (2021) has documented the use of camcorders as people viewed their favorite holiday destinations or other places such as zoos that they could no longer visit (Jarratt 2021).

The use of podcasts and videos became widespread and were used by deliberately by sections of the tourist industries, such as the Caledonian MacBrayne ferry services to sustain interest in visiting the Scottish islands once conditions improved. VisitScotland used the slogan of "Dream Now, Travel Later" to keep Scottish destinations "top of mind" (Garrison et al., this issue). Cultural installations, such as art galleries, revamped their websites to include cultural tours and lectures (Itani & Hollebeek, 2021. In India, even Arctic Tours were offered (Ghosh and Batabyal, this issue). The switch to digital tourism is documented by Garrison et al. in this volume, who suggests that there was a phased transition as the lockdowns came and went.

Most of the SPOT partners mentioned a renewed emphasis on digitalization in tourism as part of the national or regional strategies and the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated this trend. Surveys of visitors in the SPOT project showed that increasingly people visit destinations virtually ahead of going there themselves (or instead of going there) and manage their trips through various booking platforms such as Booking.com or TripAdvisor. These rapidly became the main source of information about places as people roamed their online worlds during lockdown and other sources of information were unavailable.

Future Strategies

It is still not clear to what extent the ending of lockdowns and COVID-19 restrictions will see a resumption of previous trends. However, there are

a number of ways in which cultural tourism may have changed permanently.

Firstly, the COVID-19 lockdowns offered a period of reflection and mental resetting as well as considerable business innovation. For overtouristed sites such as Barcelona, there was the opportunity to reduce or manage visitor flows more permanently by attracting quality rather than quantity in terms of visitors (Bishop et al., this issue).

Secondly, the switch to new and more rural regions may have led to a better recognition of some of these more neglected zones, which will prompt more investment and infrastructure to follow. Perhaps we will start to see landscapes in a new way, as Šťastná and colleagues suggest?

Thirdly, other innovations include setting up cultural trails using digital apps in Nitra and the development of new forms of gastronomy or literary culture as a form of tourism to add quality to the area. Gali and colleagues (this issue) suggest that visitor behavior may have changed permanently. For many cultural venues, especially very popular ones, the online prebooking systems might be retained in order to better manage visitor flows.

Fourthly, the turn to digitization may have accelerated certain trends such as cashless payments as well as the use of websites, QR codes, blogs, and booking systems. However, it has also prompted entirely new forms of digital activity, including games (in Hungary) or virtual reality media, such as the recreation of castles destroyed in the Second World War in Estonia.

Fifthly, the pandemic has forced regions and businesses to innovate, creating new cultural trails, new kinds of attractions, and new digital strategies.

Conclusions

Therefore, although tourism declined during the coronavirus pandemic in Europe, it did not disappear. Instead, people turned to domestic tourism, at times encouraged by government campaigns, and explored new forms of tourism through digital pathways or by discovering places closer to home. The role of nature and the countryside achieved greater prominence, although whether this will lead to the "green recovery" that the EU and the more utopian writers in Scottish Geographies would like to think remains to be seen.

The economic measures to maintain employment and businesses provided a cushion through the pandemic period (to those able to take advantage of it). When visitors return, the problem now appears to be that many of the tourist businesses will no longer be operating and will find themselves short of staff. This will likely push people even more toward the individualized forms of accommodation and transport, making some destinations more feasible than others.

Contrary to economic forecasts at the beginning of the pandemic, there was no worldwide global recession. Rather, there has been an economic boom following lockdowns, with high rates of growth in some countries. Pent-up demand from people who were unable to spend their money on holidays or cultural events during the lockdown periods means that cultural tourism is set to take off again. However, these economic effects are uneven and the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed widespread inequalities between those who were better off by working from home in secure jobs and those who were in more insecure labor market sectors and ones where this was not possible. The innovations in cultural tourism towards more customized and individualized forms of leisure at higher prices means that perhaps lower income groups are excluded. The emphasis on "quality" suggests a move towards higher income and higher educated populations. Certainly, the research here suggests that differences between regions are emerging but in different ways from the past.

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