

Critically consider whether sustainable tourism is achievable.

During the last decades, travelling has become lifestyle and a full-time job for many people. The social media and popular influencers show us the most beautiful places around the world on the daily basis, which encourage us to travel. As demand for travelling increased, low-cost transportation companies started to flourish, and travelling become accessible as never before. Meanwhile, the impacts of tourism are also pronounced as never before, and this leads humanity to search for new, and more sustainable ways of tourism. As a young person, who like travelling and exploring new cultures and places, I critically think about sustainable tourism. I often use cheap tickets for transportation and many other affordable services for students. But at the same token, I love nature and I care about our environment and preservation of our cultural heritage. Should I rather stay at home and do not contribute with emissions from transportation, or blindly travel across the world without thinking about my impacts? In my opinion, it is possible to get these two together, explore and travel without significant impact, because by these activities I support not only my personal development, but also countries which rely on tourism. If each person will do it in a conscious way, sustainable tourism is not that far away.

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) define tourism as: *“a social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes”*. Tourism is a complex social, cultural and economic phenomenon, which significance arises from the enormous activity and the rapidity with which it has developed. At the end of the Second World War less than 25 million people worldwide travelled for the purposes by which we define tourism, however this number increased on 900 million people annually in 2007 (UNWTO) (see fig.1). Behind this mass growth are major changes after WWII such as advances in mass communication and transportation, as well as the neoliberal agenda (Agnew, 2001). The same forces drove the concept of time-space compression, which explains the idea that distances between places have markedly shrunk, the rhythm of life has increased, and the world has become more interconnected than even before (Dicken, 2011). Development of tourism depends upon the existence of a set of prerequisites for growth such as the presence of resources and attractions (this includes natural attributes – landform, climate... and the socio-cultural heritage-historic sites, local cuisine...) and attractions for entertainment. Other essential prerequisites are infrastructure and sources of capital investment for marketing and promoting the destination (Williams, 2009).

Tourism is an essential component in modern mobilities, and has impacts across the range of social, cultural, economic and environmental contexts. It is estimated that around 200 million people rely on tourism business across variety of sectors such as travel and transportation, accommodation, promotion, entertainment or tourist retailing (Swarbrooke, 1999). Unfortunately, only a few jobs in tourism are highly paid, and most of the jobs are unstable and highly dependent on the level of demand, what is usually seasonal and takes several months. Despite the unfavourable working conditions, tourism economic impact contributes to the GDP of the local, regional and national economy. However, tourism is a highly place-specific and place-dependent, and therefore GDP contribution varies a lot in different countries. For example, in developed countries it is rarely higher than 5%, but developing countries such as small island in the Pacific Ocean heavily rely on inbound tourism which may be higher than 40%. Regarding to environmental context, tourism may enhance stricter policies in national parks, establishment of protected landscapes, and revenue from tourism may contribute to eco technologies or other environmental initiatives. Above all, tourism is a perfect way how to reduce cultural barriers and get to know new cultures, values, traditions and lifestyles (Williams, 2009).

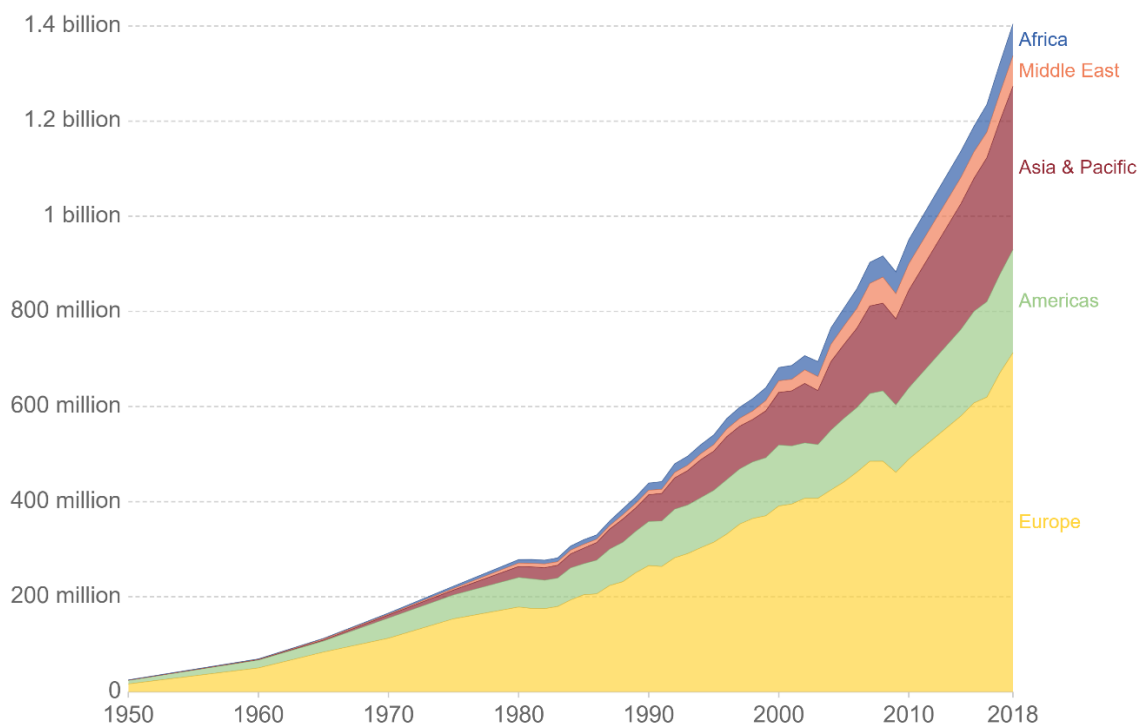


Figure 1. Detailed visualisation of international tourist arrivals by world region after the Second World War. Adapted from: UNWTO – World tourism Barometer (2019).

Although tourism is highly beneficial, it may be responsible for the negative impacts on the physical environment such as pollution of air and water, traffic congestion, physical erosion of sites, littering, disrupting animals or even killing it. Together with the increasing number of tourists, tensions between them and locals increases also. There is commercialisation and commodification of local cultures and traditions, illegal activities, or various form of crime (Williams, 2009). To minimise these negative impacts and preserve our world-known sites for future generations, we must find solutions and increase awareness of sustainable tourism.

Sustainable development represents *“Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”* (UN WCED 1987: 43). Unfortunately, many developed nations do not want to switch to sustainable development, as this will mean to reduce their profit, commodities, and growth, which are key features of the capitalist system. A popular western development model is followed by many developing countries, but it is impossible for this model to be environmentally sustainable. Furthermore, for developing countries such as India, the priority is not to cut their carbon emissions, but to ensure overall development of all sectors regardless their environmental impact. The key thing is to rethink the idea of developing needs for the contemporary world (Chari, 2009).

Sustainable tourism is defined as *“tourism which is economically viable but does not destroy the resources on which the future of tourism will depend, notably the physical environment and the social fabric of the host community”* (Swarbrooke 1999: 13). By sustainable tourism does not want to maintain a low level of tourist satisfaction, it wants to ensure a meaningful experience to the tourists, while raising awareness about sustainability issues. Moreover, it requires well informed stakeholders, as well as strong political leadership to ensure consensus building. It is a continuous process requiring collecting vast quantities of data via monitoring tourism impacts and consequently introduce the

necessary preventive and corrective measures (UNEP and UNWTO, 2005). The fact is that this sustainability is usually defined in terms of economic gains which the local community retained. For comparison, the US has the highest total tourism income with over 210 billion \$ per year, but it is only 1.1% of the country's total GDP, instead of Maldives, where total GDP from tourism makes up 60% with the value of 2.7 billion \$ per year (Atlasbig, 2018). Some islands such as Santorini in Greece, have started to put restrictions for one-day only travellers as the income from them is not sufficient and such a small island has become over-crowded very fast. Majority of these one-day travellers comes from the big cruise ships, what seems to be like sustainable transportation, but in terms of sulphur oxide forms emissions, they are bigger emitters than cars (see fig.2). In year 2019, Barcelona experienced 32.838 kg of SO_x emissions from cruise ships, and only 6.812 kg by all cars in the city (McCarthy, 2019). Transportation is an integral part of tourism, and this example points out that it is necessary to measure different impacts of various transport forms, and promote the most sustainable one, regarding to country's possibilities.

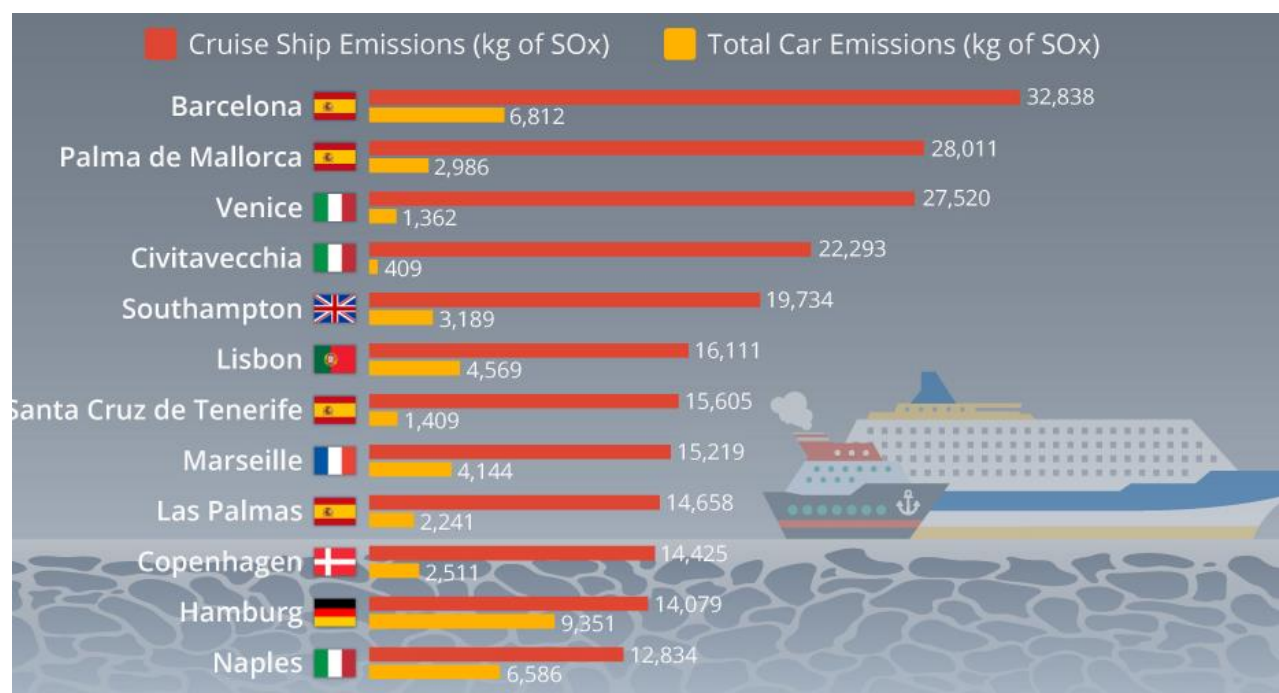


Figure 2. SO_x emissions from cruise ships compares to cars in European port cities in 2017 (kg). Adapted from: Transport and Environment, StatistaCharts.

It is also important to mention the idea of carrying capacity, described as “the maximum number of people who can use a site without an unacceptable alteration in the physical environment and the social, cultural and economic fabric of the destination and without an unacceptable decline in the quality of the experience gained by the visitors” (Wall and Mathieson 2006: 33). This capacity is very difficult to measure, as it always depends on the behaviour of tourists, seasonality of tourism, how vulnerable the environment is, and many other factors (Williams, 2009). To avoid sites degradation, it is good to set a limits of visitors per day, set higher fees and more expensive tickets, as more money could be then re-invested to those sites to repair them and improve quality of services in overall. This won't be comfortable for tourists, as visits/tours must be pre-booked online on specific hour for the world-known places, and travelling will become more expensive, but regulations are necessary in order to ensure and improve visitor experience (Seba, 2012). Further, this may encourage tourists to start looking for not that attractive places but still equally beautiful, which may lead to more evenly distributed tourism.

The global tourism production system has never been eliminated as during the pandemic of coronavirus. According to the UNWTO, international arrivals plunged 81% in July, and the drop until August represents loss of 730 billion US\$ from international tourism. This unprecedented decline is having social and economic consequences and puts millions of jobs and businesses at risk (UNWTO, 2020). On the other hand, this situation gives us a unique opportunity to build a new sustainable tourism.

Although tourism will never be completely sustainable because each industry has impacts, it can work towards becoming more sustainable. Each person can contribute to this by respecting local cultures, conserving resources, favouring businesses which preserve cultural heritage, supporting local economies by purchasing local goods, and act in an environmentally conscious way (SustainingTourism, 2008).

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