

WORDS BEYOND THE PANDEMIC: A HUNDRED-SIDED CRISIS

Coord.: José Reis
A collective work by CES

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Centro de Estudos Sociais
Universidade de Coimbra



UNIVERSIDADE DE
COIMBRA



Organização
das Nações Unidas
para a Educação,
a Ciência e a Cultura



Universidade de
Coimbra - Alta e Sã
inscrita na Lista do Património
Mundial em 2013



PROGRAMA OPERACIONAL COMERCIO E INOVAÇÃO



UNIÃO EUROPEIA

Fundo Europeu
de Desenvolvimento Regional



Fundação
para a Ciência
e a Tecnologia

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Editor

José Reis

Publisher

Centre for Social Studies
University of Coimbra

Scientific Review

Ana Cordeiro Santos, António Sousa Ribeiro, Carlos Fortuna, João Rodrigues,
José Castro Caldas, José Reis, Pedro Hespanha, Vítor Neves

Linguistic Revision

João Paulo Moreira

Editorial Assistant

Rita Kacia Oliveira

Design and Pagination

André Queda

December, 2020

This work is funded by ERDF Funds through the Competitiveness Factors Operational Programme - COMPETE and by National Funds through the FCT - Foundation for Science and Technology within the UIDB/50012/2020 project.

The data and opinions included in this publication are the exclusive responsibility of its authors.

ISBN

978-989-8847-28-7

REGENERATIVE TOURISM

Nancy Duxbury, Fiona Bakas, Tiago Vinagre Castro, Sílvia Silva

The trajectories and dynamics of mass tourism development have caused stress on host cities and communities. Large events/gatherings have become central to many tourism and cultural strategies, and mainstream approaches have been detached from more-than-economic benefits to local communities. The COVID-19 pandemic has put these issues in stark relief. The dominant tourism models are not sustainable going forward. Post-crisis, alternate trajectories will need to be articulated in order to avoid going back to “business as usual”.

Due to the pandemic, tourism and other sectors have faced a major disruption or entire collapse, and are re-emerging in what can be described as a transition phase. A less mobile era is emerging, characterised by an increase in ‘proximity tourism’ (with a renewed emphasis on domestic tourism and partnered ‘bubble’ countries) as well as longer stays in one area instead of flitting from place to place. Crowded events with strangers will be less attractive and smaller-scale activities may emerge.

In the short and medium-term, while travel businesses are being reconfigured, travelers are also rethinking the kind of travel they are able and comfortable to pursue. Among potential travelers, a growth in conscientious travel is expected, with a socially minded mindset and sense of solidarity, emphasising personal responsibility, spending money where most needed, supporting local businesses, and doing things for the public good.

In rethinking and redefining tourism, new approaches should be built, aimed at the public good and based on the interests of local communities. After extended periods of lockdown, shorter destinations have new opportunities in this ‘new normal’, with recent surveys showing a growing interest in smaller, less-crowded destinations such as small cities, towns, and villages as well as natural, rural, and remote areas.

Regenerative tourism encourages the things that matter most in ways that benefit the whole, although never at the expense of its parts. Regenerative tourism approaches emphasise more conscientious options, to the explicit benefit of the community. Sustainable and responsible tourism principles also apply, with growing attention to careful management and local impacts.

Culture- and community-based small-scale creative tourism can provide regenerative options for local traditions and specificities. Creative tourism develops options and activities geared to smaller social bubbles and small group interaction, rather than to large crowds. This approach aligns with planning for longer stays. It offers visitors an array of interesting incentives and activities, with a focus not only on getting immersed in and connected to the place, but also on active learning and doing.

In an integrated approach, communities must be centrally engaged in reconceiving and restructuring their tourism development for the public good. Attention to regenerative tourism approaches will provide social, cultural and economic added value for local host communities.