

“Post-viral tourism’s antagonistic tourist imaginaries”

Rodanthe Tzanelli

Abstract

Purpose – *This paper aims to examine the antagonistic coexistence of different tourism imaginaries in global post-viral social landscapes. Such antagonisms may be resolved at the expense of the ethics of tourism mobility, if not adjudicated by post-human reflexivity. Currently, unreflexive behaviours involve the refusal to conform to lifesaving “stay-at-home” policies, the tendency to book holidays and the public inspection of death zones.*

Design/methodology/approach – *Each of the consumption styles explored in this paper to discuss post-COVID-19 tourism recovery corresponds to at least one tourist imaginary, antagonistically placed against social imaginaries of moral betterment, solidarity, scientific advancement, national security and labour equality. A multi-modal collection of audio-visual and textual data, gathered through social media and the digital press, is categorised and analysed via critical discourse analysis.*

Findings – *Data in the public domain suggest a split between pessimistic and optimistic attitudes that forge different tourism futures. These attitudes inform different imaginaries with different temporal orientations and consumption styles.*

Social implications – *COVID-19 has exposed the limits of the capacity to efficiently address threats to both human and environmental ecosystems. As once popular tourist locales/destinations are turned by COVID-2019s spread into risk zones with morbid biographical records their identities alter and their imaginaries of suffering become anthropocentric.*

Originality/value – *Using Castoriadis’ differentiation between social and radical imaginaries, Foucault’s biopolitical analysis, Sorokin’s work on mentalities and Sorel’s reflections on violence, the author argue that this paper has entered a new phase in the governance and experience of tourism, which subsumes the idealistic basis of tourist imaginaries as cosmopolitan representational frameworks under the techno-cultural imperatives of risk, individualistic growth through the adventure (“edgework”) and heritage preservation. This paper also needs to reconsider the contribution of technology (not technocracy) to sustainable post-COVID-19 scenarios of tourism recovery.*

Keywords *Antagonism, Risk, Cosmopolitanism, Imaginary, Mobilities, Techno-culture*

Paper type *Research paper*

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Introduction

The present article examines frameworks of practical transformation in tourism, which has been globally affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. I argue that such frameworks are filtered through collective imaginaries of life and death, which animate different forms of tourism, but especially dark tourism. The problem with such established patterns of tourism mobility is not that they exist, but how they are embedded in particular structures of material and ideological development (Mowforth and Munt, 1998). Such development feeds and is fed by popular cultural discourses, which consider tourism as the dominant global developmental paradigm separately from concerns about environmental pollution, overtourism and host prosperity (Lafferty and Eckerberg, 2013).

This brings me to this special issue’s focus on the notion of “crisis” as both a critical turning point in the history of our planet and an occasion of judgement (*krísis*) over the nature of

Received 11 July 2020
Revised 20 September 2020
22 October 2020
Accepted 4 November 2020

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human action. Several recent publications in the field suggest that tourism mobilities need radical rethinking in a post-COVID-19 world, to ensure the harmonious coexistence of natural and human ecosystems, thus warning that we cannot go back to the way things were. Recovery models draw on phased resilience, factoring in potential failures to reach prosperity and repetition of previous phases in the cycle, in search of successful formulas (Lew *et al.*, 2020). Looking past the optimism carried within such pronouncements but also the pessimistic certainty that we have reached the last days of tourism as an activity, I want to interrogate how COVID-19 might have actually worked miracles in reinforcing repertoires of practical action implicated in the management of life and death by centres of economic power – only now, such repertoires will be mobilised to regulate tourist recreational activities. This is often known as “biopolitics”, the ways physical (the site of the human body – Foucault, 1998), the legalistic (the site of citizenship and belonging – Agamben, 1998) and the discursive (e.g. discourses of risk concerning the integrity of a political body – Foucault, 1997, 2007) work in synergy to turn imaginaries of solidarity into authoritarian visions of community and belonging. The dystopian scenario of the “end” or “death” of tourism as we know it, is not progressive, when it reinforces biopolitical organisations of our planet, which are resold as “sustainable tourism”. Considering that tourism is a system of services subjected to complexity (evident in the aforementioned model of adaptation/resilience), and that, pragmatically, systemic development is always localised (indeed, for some the local is or should be the new focus of sustainable development – Lapointe, 2020), such suggestions may set one part of the system against the flourishing of another (Sharpley, 2020).

The “academy of hope” in tourism studies works towards such potentialities (Ateljevic *et al.*, 2013). Incidentally, however, Ateljevic's (2020, pp. 469-470) recent connection of regenerative agriculture and transformative tourism to the achievement of sociocultural transformation posits the role of “cultural creatives” as key agential forces in it. Thus, her analysis and that of others does not escape the biopolitical logic, it just modifies its function. I, therefore, argue that in post-COVID-19 tourism, biopolitics, the governance of life and death, will continue to shape tourism mobilities; we simply cannot be social beings outside the organisation of our life by our communities, the state or our independent, even anarchic transmodern enclaves (Tzanelli, 2011, 2015; Lapointe and Coulter, 2020). Lest I exercise naïve pessimism, I add that this governing will inform and be informed by a group of conflicting imaginaries of sustainability, which will expose once again, the limitations and failures of unrestrained economic growth. The feared “end of tourism” is an old scenario, entangled in the ways dystopian art repeatedly imagined the restructuring of life in world societies in fictional contexts of crisis or by allegorising real crises of mobility, rather than specifically tourism (Tzanelli, 2016, 2020). Dystopian scenarios about the end of tourism are associated with forms of representation purified of vulgarity (e.g. the kitschification of dark tourism) and always entangled with future potentialities to prosper (Sorokin, 1937-1941/1982; Jackson, 2011). Much like old scenarios of building resilience capacity, new ones do not operate outside frameworks of belonging. Instead of wallowing on them as “the problem”, we need to attack their current exclusionary structures and functionality that support unrestrained capitalist growth (Benjamin *et al.*, 2020; Tzanelli, 2018).

To be clear, my aim in this paper is to redirect attention to already existing imaginaries of social organisation, on which policymaking currently draws, rather than proffer policy solutions, to discuss the survival of bad biopolitical ecologies after the end of the pandemic. Before we envisage bright futures, we must deal with potentially dark ones, which, given the resilience of capitalism, are more likely to survive than the optimistic pronouncements of change in current tourism analysis. With this in mind, the following Section 1 outlines my conceptual and analytical framework on imaginary formations of tourism recovery, as well as my methodological portfolio, which is informed by studies of “cultural circulation”, especially in new social media. A critical discourse analysis (CDA) of concrete examples of conflicting imaginaries of tourism recovery and regrowth (or degrowth) is enacted in the

third section. There, I delve into the resurrection or reinforcement of specific representational repertoires of leisure, as well as the emergence of new ones, commenting on their problematic co-existence and potentialities. Such repertoires strengthen imaginaries of capitalist development in which dark tourism mobilities and technological mobilities act as drivers at the expense of both human and environmental ecologies. I will conclude in more detail on the latter, providing some reflections on ways forward through a critique of the current structuring of capitalist mobilities in the sector.

Epistemological and methodological considerations

The “social imaginary” has been studied extensively in the social sciences. The term, which is traced in the works of [Castoriadis \(1975/1987\)](#), [Anderson \(2006\)](#) and [Taylor \(2004\)](#), emphasises how the social comes to life when we establish associations between ideas, people and objects. Such relations commence from personal imaginings and are meaning-making mechanisms: they produce a symbolic matrix within which we imagine our collective social worlds. In Castoriadis’ thesis, the individual (“radical”) imaginary, which asserts its autonomous creative capacity over the collective, feeds into the collective (“social”), which acts as a community-making mechanism. We can easily ascertain how this applies to the tensions and collaborations between autonomous tourist subjectivity and the system of tourist representations: for example, in critical tourism analysis, [Salazar and Graburn \(2016\)](#) call attention to the ways imagined modes of place and culture contribute to their commoditisation, but [Appadurai \(1996\)](#), [Salazar \(2020\)](#) and [Tzanelli \(2020\)](#) also point in the opposite direction, stressing that imagining place can be subjected to the stylistics and rules of alternative realities produced by individuals or small groups, thus inducing social change. Representational assemblages of place and culture are both “out there”, existing prior to our understanding or engagement with sociocultural problems, such as those induced by the COVID-19 lockdown, and processes taking shape “on the go” in our minds, as and when societal crises unfold.

The current COVID-19 crisis does not develop in a void, but is enmeshed in a web of global crises that humanity and its natural habitat face, including wars, massive population movements, as well as climate change and viral outbreaks. This means that imaginary representations of society in regard to the crises are the product of a complexity that extends beyond tourism as an activity and a system ([Urry, 2003](#)). [Levy and Spicer \(2013, p. 660\)](#) help us to focus analytically on this assemblage of crises with their conception of “climate imaginaries” as socio-economic systems structuring a field around shared understandings of the climate. They suggest that imaginaries become dominant only when they articulate popular interests and identities and align with economic and technological considerations pertaining systems of mobility. Then, they conclude, imaginaries form “value regimes” that are re-circulated in the social field to shape social action and policy. I draw on [Cresswell’s \(2006, pp. 1–10\)](#) suggestion that mobilities of the kind with which I deal evolve around practice, power and the production of meaning. As meaning-making machines, tourism imaginaries articulate both political interests and tropes of hope associated with anti-establishment perspectives.

We deal with new complexities that also redefine what the “environment” stands for in fields of action and perception and the extent to which it is valued either as “nature” or a post-human assemblage, in which humans can flourish only if they respect it ([Smith-Nonini, 2017](#)). “Complexity” is embedded in conceptions of sustainability, which disclose environmental, socio-cultural and economic dynamics, each vying for domination over the rest, as each of them is wedded to a different social philosophy and course of action. Where environmental sustainability calls for reducing resource consumption, socio-cultural sustainability focusses on community participation, respect for cultural difference and urban justice and economic sustainability prioritises local/national economic growth and livelihood protection ([Sneddon, 2000](#); [Iaquinto, 2018](#)). Methodologically, this invites tourism studies

scholars to side with the critical turn in the field, which acknowledges better the crisis of representation that societies face today (Jennings, 2009; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011).

In my analysis of the imaginaries of tourism recovery, sustainability and destruction, I trace repetitive repertoires in the print and digital spheres of cultural production. The realisation of the social imaginary takes place through the articulation of statements that this article approaches via CDA as points of contestation. Repetitive repertoires convey value regimes and such regimes manifest as discursive formations. I identify two primary opposing discourses addressing recovery in the tourism sector, namely, the first focusses on established pre-COVID-19 consumerist practises in holiday-making that connect to transgressive habits and the thanatourist gaze (the consumption of new COVID-19 death sites). The second revises the concept of sustainability through the adoption of a slower pace of life and slow tourism. This appeals to ideas of cosmopolitan justice because it addresses climate change as a problem entangled with viral mobilities in responsible ways. A multi-modal collection of audio-visual and textual resources from new social media sites, such as YouTube (3 videos), TV channels (2 American and 3 British), blogs (3 articles) and the international press (12 articles) and documents released by international policy coordinators [one by World Health Organization (WHO) and one by United Nations (UN)] is enacted to analyse these (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001). Mixed methods are necessary, when one data source is inadequate, the explanatory framework needs expanding or the adopted theoretical perspective requires more elaboration (Greene, 2007, p. 20; Creswell, 2015). The introduction of complexity in our sociocultural life due to overlapping crises renders combined methods and multi-modality useful tools. Such methods draw on pragmatism and critical realism to question binaries between qualitative and quantitative, truth and untruth, positivism and constructivism (Felizer, 2010).

Latour (2005, p. 79) explains that imaginaries need cognitive and textual “images” to enable social agents to realise the social. In discussing methodological applications of the thesis on social and cultural imaginaries to mobilities studies, Couldry (2012, pp. 27-28) points to the importance of studying meeting points and accumulations of resources and routines in new media sites, where such “images” are stored. Mobilities of ideas and practices emerge in media-saturated contexts, where social imaginaries are shared, thus producing a collective symbolic matrix. Gaonkar and Povinelli (2003, p. 386) argue that today, societies, which prioritise the circulation of ideas, experience an intensification of “mediated public forms”. Valaskivi and Sumiala (2014, p. 233) remind us that widely distributed (digital and print) texts, images and symbols both have a materiality that activates the circulation of imaginaries and participate in articulations of social action. These imaginaries of (un)sustainability can be place or country-specific, as discourses reflecting global challenges to tourism tend to re-localise tourist activities. Because, as both Urry (2007, pp. 18-20) and Creswell (2015, pp. 116-117) note, places are never finished products but subjected to processes of flow and mobility, I read such textual imaginaries at the intersection of the global and the local, stressing where and how they acquire more regional or national/cultural resonance.

Tourism and biopolitical organisation: cultures of pessimism and hope

I begin by discussing how cultural specificity articulates biopolitics in tourism and consumption at large. The ways popular responses to COVID-19 lockdown policies around the world exposed the cultural specificity of consumer behaviours is staggering. From March 2020, the elevation of COVID-19 to the status of a global pandemic saw many Western and non-Western countries closing their borders and imposing restrictions on citizen mobilities. However, both centralised policymaking and citizen reactions to it were, up to a point, culturally conditioned, with Western societies displaying the weakest forms of mobility regulation and the Asian and economically marginal European ones the strictest,

followed by an equally conforming citizen behaviour. Where authoritarian regimes, such as those in China or Sri Lanka mobilised the military to maintain the lockdown process (Colombo Gazette, 2020), tourism mobilities ceased altogether. Notably, amongst such non-Western, economically weak or marginal European countries we find many heavily reliant upon tourism, so the gradual easing of lockdown in the summer months saw the tourism sector willing to take risks at the expense of the health and safety of the industry's labour.

Contrariwise, in more developed countries, such as the US and the UK, risk-taking attitudes have been a constant pattern shared across centres of mobility governance and citizenry, with many Britons, for example, trying to book holidays early, and even more opting for short trips to the British beaches that violated the rules of the lockdown (Moore, 2020). Both American President Donald Trump's and the British Tory Government's planning emphasised the need for a quick economic recovery, despite any pretensions to prioritise the safety of the nation. The focus on recovery is apparent in Prime Minister Boris Johnson's encouragement of "staycations" in the UK (Shehadi, 2020). Although this encouragement appears to be sustainable in spirit, it is not because to date, no consistent measures have been taken to ensure public compliance with the rules of social distancing. As an addendum, I should note that such attitudes have not actually yielded positive results in countries such as Sweden, in which the government avoided imposing prohibitions to business. Data reveal that per million people, Sweden "has suffered 40% more deaths than the USA, 12 times more than Norway, 7 times more than Finland and 6 times more than Denmark", but the Central Bank still expects its economy to contract by 4.5%, whereas its unemployment rate jumped to 9% in May from 7.1% in March (Goodman, 2020).

Such attitudinal trends illustrate the advanced neoliberalisation of these countries' economies, which thrives on the individualisation of responsibility and the non-evidence driven prioritisation of the economic growth halted by the pandemic (Evans and Sewell, 2014). Because the idea of neoliberal freedom of choice dominates the field of action, the tourist-consumer's decision-making assumes the proportions of a *myth of freedom* that feeds into tourist imaginaries. As Sorel (1909, 1999) has noted, myths act as the will to action, consolidating forms of allegedly necessary violence to the social matrix. Where he saw in such violence the potential for a proletarian revolution, I see the consolidation of free privileged movement across borders for leisure, which produces a variety of risks and inequalities. With most medical experts warning us now that the virus will not be expunged that easily, and that we have to modify our behaviour to survive it, the "will to touristic movement" ceases to be a right (Cresswell, 2006) and becomes unsustainable behaviour of potentially criminogenic proportions, if the mobile subject is inconsiderate towards others and themselves. In fact, the myth of freedom, which even inspired alt-right protests against mobility restrictions in some American states and elsewhere in the world, is supplemented by the consolidation of what sociologists call "edgework" as a Western leisure trend.

Normally, edgework is applied to extreme sports activities (e.g. skydiving and parkour) and involves voluntary risk-taking for the adrenaline rush or perceived self-growth and individual accomplishment (Yar and Tzanelli, 2019), but, when placed in COVID-19 contexts, it involves ordinary leisure pursuits (e.g. visiting crowded beaches) in extraordinary circumstances (i.e. the necessity to socially distance), sustaining inconsiderate behaviours that affect collective well-being. Normally, edgework draws on romantic imaginaries of individual accomplishment by adventure or in specific sports, contact with nature. However, the pandemic sets the imaginary of growth via such activities against that of social welfare, especially where the health and safety of labour are involved in tourist resorts (Duncan et al., 2013). The culture of indifference towards host welfare becomes a human rights issue by default, as it endorses the withdrawal of accountability and in some cases also local empowerment in tourism planning (Jamal, 2019, pp. 45-46). This comes as an addition to the estrangement of localities from their place in intensely tourismified areas, turning them

into “others” (Lapointe, 2020). Again, we see a stark difference between Western and some non-Western attitudes even in westernised countries, such as Japan. The Japanese Environment Ministry has been pro-active in the protection of some labour force, as it currently promotes the idea of “workcations” or working in vacation-like settings, in “34 national parks and 80 hot spring resorts across the nation in response to increased remote work and decreased tourism due to the new coronavirus pandemic” (Abe, 2020). I will return to the promotion of the technocratic imaginary below, but such initiatives are certainly more beneficial than the aforementioned attitudes.

Although edgework informs current realities, I contend that its romantic individualist rationale may be here to stay post-COVID-19. Edgework’s romantic appeal has emotional and physical dimensions, which can be exploited by tourist markets both in progressive and insensitive ways. Progressively, we may see tourist industries adapting their business ethos to slow, environmentally friendly mobilities or contrariwise, replacing physical with emotional risk-taking to exploit the dark tourist potential of COVID-19. These two hypotheses conform to two different and only potentially conflicting imaginaries.

From pessimism to dark tourism

One of the most prevalent consequences of the coronavirus spread has been the dismantling of organised cultures of coping with death and dying, both at personal/interpersonal and organisational/institutional levels. Especially where COVID-19 deaths have been the outcome of “herd immunity” or sheer institutional indifference, as is the case with the US and Brazil, the practical management of burial has been demoted to a process matching such indifference. The development of mass burial sites for COVID-19 victims from the poorer social classes, produced a post-humous culture of inequality across different cultures, which favours the manipulation of social memory. Mass burials may endorse individual anonymity in the ritual, which stands in stark contrast to the individualisation of mobility in modernity, especially in touring cultures. Interestingly, in this particular instance, although the dead lose their social connectivity (we do not know their personal biographies), they are placed in networks of cultural memory connecting to notions of place, community and nation. This biographical airbrushing is a form of violence, which may endorse a dark tourism imaginary of consumption post-COVID-19.

In tourism, commemorating death is a practice and an ideal wedded to organisational patterns of mobility (e.g. managing tours to such sites of memory) but also moral structures of recovery from trauma (e.g. community involvement in rituals of remembrance), respectively (Giesen, 2004; Korstanje and Ivanov, 2012). As a ritual, dark tourism can both transcend and reinforce the logic of leisure/entertainment (Stone, 2006, 2013). The ambivalence is rooted in what Seaton (1996) saw in “thanatopsis”, gazing on other people’s death, a cathartic experience or *Schadenfreude* consolidating our own biopolitical status: we are amongst the living. The transformation of former concentration camps but also heritage sites, such as those associated with histories of slavery, terrorism and climate change disasters to dark tourism sites is well-documented in tourism analysis (Ashworth and Isaac, 2015; Martini and Buda, 2020). Sitting at an intersection between economic, political and ecological concerns, dark tourism produces its own imaginaries of recovery and resilience. We must bear in mind that social imaginaries do not serve just as community-making mechanisms, but extend their function to the articulation of strategies we associate with “imagined economies” (Jessop, 2010, p. 345). Modifying Hollinshead’s (2009) point, I argue that networked capitalism, which develops around and in collaboration with the nation-state, can act as an assemblage of agency in representations and imaginaries of place, events and cultures. Hollinshead (2009) sees in the nation-state’s agency the function of the “mythomoteur of tourism”, which may deny other visions of cultural life, whereas I relocate this agency to networks forged between the nation-state and international tourism markets.

In light of these observations, the mass burial sites of the COVID-19 diseased are rendered vulnerable to future exploitation by tourist industries that “milk the macabre”. We deal with political and economic strategisations of affective geographies (Martini and Buda, 2020, p. 685), as these can be both generalised/globalised (via the elimination of the biographies of diseased subjects) and localised (producing dark landscapes the nation-state can own and market to the world as sites of disaster). Currently, there are a number of videos in the public domain generated by global media networks, in which such mass burial sites are inspected “from above” (helicopter views) and “below” (operated by on-foot cameramen/women) (Global News, 2020; BBC News US and Canada, 2020; Berger, 2020; South China Morning Post, 2020); photographs of such graves, complete with teams of grave-diggers in action (Al-Arshani, 2020; Voa News, 2020); and full reports on the centralised management of them (Daniel, 2020). As Chouliaraki (2006, p. 50) and Buda and McIntosh (2013) suggest, mediatisation can endorse emotional distancing, thus facilitating the objectification of suffering and the transformation of experience into a product for consumption. Some dark tourist markets contribute to transformations of what Reijnders (2009, p. 175) has termed “guilty landscapes” into anodyne commodities, so it would not be injudicious to fear that COVID-19 mass burial sites may meet the same fate in the future: they are de facto sites of mourning, already connecting family histories to those of the nation in heritage styles (Walter, 2009).

From optimism to slow tourism

Sustainability connects to human survival, so it is embedded in biopolitics. In this vein, imaginaries of growth at all costs can be supplemented or replaced by an optimistic ecological scenario endorsing technologically informed market innovation that is based on clean energy. In the tourist sector, such scenarios are very popular across different interest groups because they promise to both limit climate change and restore growth with limited changes to the ways things work. A socialist critique of such scenarios of tourism recovery relates to the contradiction between capitalist development and environmental sustainability (Foster *et al.*, 2010). There is also the fear that in tourism, they endorse deterritorialised consumption of place (Lapointe, 2020, p. 637). However, there is also evidence that, despite its lateral contribution to techno-markets that adopt green policies without putting a stop to growth, they offer solutions that are practically achievable.

We cannot avoid discussing technology in the context of modernity and modernisation, so associations between techno-markets and tourism can only be part of post-COVID-19 tourism recovery scenarios. Most critical sociological and political economic analysis on them adopts a negative stance due to their involvement in corporatist action. However, COVID-19’s real catastrophist context should also prompt us to ask what such imaginaries may be able to offer in terms of practical solutions to problems only bound to amplify, if we opt for extremist options. When it comes to the mobilisation of new technologies by such techno-markets (so, I clarify that the suggested course of practical action is not by reference to styles governance, as above, but specific technological tools), the internet can prove a way forward. For some time, and definitely into the period of COVID-19 lockdowns, social media platforms have acted as our only window to the outside world. Although there are several critiques of the ways they operate, such platforms hosted a variety of open access cultural and pedagogical events, which proved beneficial for the global viewers’ mental well-being. Exiting this digital world after the end of the pandemic need not eliminate its impact on the ways we travel the world sustainably. The subject has already entered the public discussion in the context of VR engagement with different places and cultures, and has informed educational programmes on the environment (Skinner, 2020). There is already a vast literature on digital travel (Germann Molz, 2012; Tzanelli, 2015, 2016, 2020), cinematic (Tzanelli, 2010) and film-induced tourism (Beeton, 2016), which interconnects embodied with virtual movement. The COVID-19 experience may strengthen such links,

producing more organised virtual tourism, which is not followed by physical visits to the represented travel destinations. A technological imaginary of movement through space is both sustainable (it harms the environment less, by producing less carbon footprint) and inclusive (it allows physically immobile citizens to experience the world).

Let us begin, however, by pointing out that the idea of low-carbon mobilities is identified by such middle-ground constituencies as an adaptive capitalist imaginary that enables “accumulation by decarbonisation” (Böhm *et al.*, 2012; Levy and Spicer, 2013; UN Environment Programme, 2020). Even such debates are replete with capitalist contradictions, with a primary example that of the Amazon company, which has initiated eco-friendly consumption protocols with recyclable packaging, but has also been accused of failure to protect its staff from COVID-19 exposure (Carlile, 2020). Some public fora cling to catastrophist scenarios and quote a small reduction to this year’s annual emissions by just 6%–8%, which is not enough to save the planet, if no proper national and cross-national coordination is not adopted (Vince, 2020). There is evidence by now that not only have global lockdown policies improved the quality of the atmosphere, especially in urban areas, but a compulsory change in lifestyles may also improve attitudinal trends towards the environment in the future. There is also evidence that deforestation, intensive agriculture, as well as unsafe management and consumption of wildlife and natural resources undermine ecosystems, increasing the risk for future pandemics. United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres’ call to manage better post-COVID-19 attitudes to the environment, amongst other things, were followed by WHO’s publication of a “Manifesto for a healthy recovery from COVID-19” (WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2020). The manifesto’s establishment of a direct link between environmental degradation and well-being deterioration suggested that “slow tourism mobilities” and even philosophies of “degrowth” are more topical than ever for the recovery of the tourism sector.

The notion of “slowness” adheres to an imaginary of sustainability, which is articulated in less materialistic lifestyles, small-scale production, cooperatives and community-based services (Van Bommel and Spicer, 2011). This imaginary resurrects the 19th-century romantic ethos, which valued nature and rural life against intensive industrialisation (Schumacher, 1973). It is a more recent evolution in Jackson’s (2011) *Prosperity without Growth* advocates degrowth, which can also endorse unhealthy localism and tourismophobia. Between these two propositions stands the *cittaslow* movement of slower tourism mobilities, which advocates a moderation in automobility, staycation and low-carbon footprint leisure. Again, this draws on ideas of staycationing – a style of staying local that many tourist operators have already embraced in their advertising of post-COVID-19 holidays, alongside the idea of remote domestic destinations, which advocates a continuation of philosophies of “social distancing”.

In terms of paradigmatic classification, this is the imaginary of hope that is advocated by the critical tourist studies school (Fullagar and Wilson, 2012). Haywood (2020) stresses how some localities suffering from “under-tourism” may actually benefit from this shift. That this change can be achieved after the end of a pandemic presents the morbid experience of COVID-19 as a radical lesson, an unplanned critical pedagogical journey. For example, there is some hope that Britons will turn to staycations even after the elimination of the pandemic. VisitBritain, the national tourism agency, claims that £19.3bn was spent by British residents on 97.4 million overnight trips in England in 2018, with £53bn spent on 1.4 billion domestic tourism day trips (ITV Report, 2020).

Still, nevertheless, it must be noted that many once budding heritage and blended tourist destinations cannot rely exclusively on such options. Unlike the opportunities that Indonesian locals have to fly from Jakarta to the beaches of Bali for a domestic vacation or Tokyo residents to visit Mount Fuji for a short hiking trip and New Yorkers to visit the Hamptons on Long Island, Singaporeans, who rely heavily on international clientele and are already facing a \$20bn hole in national revenues suffer the impact of COVID-19 restrictions

on international movement (Bangkok Post, 2020). The same alarm was sound in Greece in June, however, despite the government's continuous cautionary policy of containment, guidelines were issued in July in gradually accepting international tourists in the country, including even Britons (Kokkinidis, 2020). An allegedly sustainable combination of domestic tourism with the creation of "tourism bubbles" also proved problematic in the context of COVID-19 topical resurgence in Thailand and other countries (Bangprapa and Wipatayotin, 2020). In terms of biopolitical sorting of labour, one may wonder what the idea of a "bubble" will do to social inequalities in tourism mobilities, as it places market-driven tourism industries in the role of the policymaker.

Conclusion

Moore (2011) discusses how "world ecological regimes" modulate action in anthropocenic contexts, with particular reference to the emanation of values from interactions between ecological systems and regimes of accumulation. In post-COVID-19 landscapes of tourism recovery, what will count as an ecological regime will be overdetermined by intention (e.g. is capital growth the end game?) and the subject or object orientation of recovery (e.g. will the well-being of labour be prioritised or the client's comfort and the business' growth?). These will also interact with the cultural forces that structure tourism imaginaries, not always in deterministic/economic ways, as place histories and national imaginaries can also intervene in the formation of social action.

Regardless of the structural constrictions imposed on the formation of post-COVID-19 imaginaries of recovery, based on current attitudes and data, I want to present a series of styles of imagining the future that are shared across several sociocultural contexts. Firstly, I highlight the presence of a primary antagonistic mode within the viral imaginaries, which centres on moods or political atmospheres and bifurcates between cultures of pessimism about the future and cultures of hope. This primary scaffolding, which rests on the experiential dimensions of the pandemic, further extends and sustains subject orientations: where once popular tourist locales/destinations might be turned by COVID-19's spread into risk zones and "dark spots" with morbid biographical records, their identities will alter and their imaginaries, will become anthropocentric. Human suffering will form one of the central themes in their recovery and this may even obliterate certain established styles of tourism mobilities in them, replacing them with serious education-orientated visits. Contrariwise, where and if human activity imposed by the lockdown has changed behaviours towards the environment durably and for the better, tourist imaginaries will become more post-human and environmentally friendly, endorsing more staycationing, agritourism, slow tourism and ecotourism. This secondary modal bifurcation, which is action orientated, rests on a tertiary, temporal one: where pessimism and dark tourism modes or imaginaries of climate catastrophism will be looking to collective pasts, optimism, sustainability and some techno-cultural imaginaries will be geared towards the future. In conclusion, one may say that tourism imaginaries are not flights of fancy but cultures of circulation that signpost ways of moving in time, psychic fields enabling perceptions of reality, of methodological value.

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