



New rays of hope for rural tourism? AT, 27.4.2020



Tourism after 2020 – Business as usual or Transformation?, AT

*Christian Baumgartner, expert in sustainable tourism, response & ability
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read the full text here (IMG/docx/messages_from_the_countryside_at_christian_20_04_27.docx)

One way or another. 2020 will remain a synonym for massive changes in tourism for a long time. Where the development is heading, what exactly the changes consist of, is currently (End of April 2020) characterized by functional optimism, wishful thinking or reading the tea-leaves - so much for the spoiler at the beginning of this article. Thinking about an end to tourism as we have known it until now is currently a taboo.

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More optimistic assessments can be heard from the scientific community. The adventure researcher Gerhard Frank, for example, writes that the corona virus may have "ushered in the end of the fun culture" and "finally dealt the deathblow to the masses [mass tourism]". From a sustainability perspective, however, this can be attributed more to wishful thinking than to a realistic change strategy for an actual renewal of tourism from scratch.

What can be stated with a certain degree of certainty at the moment?

Compared to the tour operators (and airlines), the destinations and accommodations are - despite complaints from the professional associations - in a comparatively comfortable situation. Even if foreign guests will only gradually return, probably from the 2021 season onwards, at least the domestic market will start up again in the course of summer 2020. The security precautions will certainly make the holiday seem strange to us, and the caution of many travellers with regard to crowds will change the local event offerings. My forecast is that therefore soft, extensive holiday regions will be able to recover earlier. Where before 2020 lonely hikes and resorts were very popular, summer holidays will remain. The President of the

Swiss Travel Association, Max E. Katz, can imagine that "**the way we travel will change and increasingly develop towards individuality, nature and originality**".

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When the airlines say that a return to normality - i.e. to the situation before March 2020 - "can be expected in 2023 at the earliest" , the same applies to the tour operators. The only difference is that they cannot negotiate with governments about billions of dollars in subsidies.

A setback for the sustainability of long-distance tourism is already foreseeable. Up to now, sustainable offers have been those that offered direct contact with the locals instead of sightseeing tours, visited local markets instead of staying in sterile ***** hotels, travelled by public transport instead of in rented four-wheel drive cars. Will the future virus-sensitive long-distance travellers now prefer the hygienically sterilized all-in resorts with baby elephant distance to the neighbourly beach towel? Hard to say.

So, what next?

The Austrian economic researcher Egon Smeral puts it in a nutshell: "In the final analysis, however, the creativity of Austrian tourists, which has already been proven on several occasions, can help to significantly increase the pace of catching up." So: catching up as quickly as possible on what was not possible in 2020, and then returning to (new) normality, to business as usual, as if nothing had happened? In my opinion, this approach is far too limited. **The growth paradigm in tourism has come to its end**, we urgently need other success factors than a constant increase in the number of arrivals and overnight stays.

The actors in the sustainability debate are currently integrating the issue of resilience more strongly into the discourse everywhere. Resilience has so far been more part of the discussions on climate adaptation. **Economic resilience** against completely unexpected events will become much more important in the future, even if we can say with a fair degree of certainty from the experiences of the last decade that this will not be the last virus.

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But do we really have to go back? The Austrian Minister for the Environment and Climate, Leonore Gewessler, calls for integrated climate conditions if Austrian Airlines and other companies are supported by the state. Regula Rytz, member of the Swiss parliament, goes a step further and says "The corona crisis is a break in the modern travel world. [...] Let us therefore use this caesura to restructure travel. Let's invest in European rail connections, in holiday experiences on our doorstep and in educational opportunities for people who today live from environmentally harmful forms of tourism. They need new perspectives."

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We now have the opportunity to integrate more sustainability into all support measures and to develop new scenarios and business models. For example, in the alpine tourism hot spots, converting hotel rooms into living space and thus making it easier for the local youth to stay. ...

Sustainable tourism also directly includes the observance of ecological and social limits in order to avoid both mass tourism (from an environmental perspective) and overtourism (from the perspective of the local population). Political and financial incentive systems must promote sustainable forms of tourism and prevent (far to) intensive forms of tourism. ...

Perhaps the adventure researcher Gerhard Frank is right after all about the end of alpine mass tourism. If politics plays a steering role. But then we have to start talking about the necessary changes and not make a fundamental transformation of the tourism industry taboo. So far it does not look like that.

Feldkirch, 27.4.2020

Personal note of the author:

Of course, like everyone else, I am also affected by the restrictions on travel. Numerous in-ternational conferences have been cancelled, the planned excursions with my students are not possible, several project trips have been postponed or cancelled indefinitely. Neverthe-less, after years of very intensive professional travel, I do not find this - forced - deceleration unpleasant. I am very curious to see what all this - video conferences, Distant Teaching, ... - will remain 'afterwards'.