Viral Urban Tourism within Viral Society: Sociological Touring Guides using Apps and e-Books

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INTRODUCTION: FOR AN INTELLIGENT SOCIAL TOURING AT VIRAL SOCIETY
Aims

Intelligent urban tourism is a strategy of resistance against the current pandemic situation caused by Covid-19, which has profoundly affected all economic, political and cultural activities worldwide. Intelligent tourism uses not just information on places to visit, but also knowledge about social and cultural processes subjacent to those localities. The present text intends to understand such new problematic social conjuncture, by exercising criticism both on some ways of travelling e.g. within mass tourism, and on some styles of reflecting about tourism e.g. certain sociological and cultural positions on these matters. In fact, cities, tourism, culture, science, and technologies, must aim not only to be 'smart' (e.g. 'smart cities'), but also intelligent: that is, to produce and disseminate (theoretical and practical) knowledge and critical interpretations and explanations, rather than just transmit mere and more smarts descriptions of the urban fabric, and correct ways of behaving in the normalized city.

Fig 1. Cultural tourism decay in most countries
Source: SIC TV channel, https://sicnoticias.pt Photo credits: Pedro Andrade

This article discusses the first theoretical and practical contours of an on-going research project, in order to contribute to find effective and affective answers to this anomalous social urgency.

The pandemic situation and the mask issue in July 2020

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, Portugal was chosen as the world's best tourism destination for three consecutive years (2017-2019), and Lisbon was designated as the Best City Destination and City Break at the *World Travel Awards* event 2020 [1], besides conquering the title of *Lisbon Green Capital 2020* [2]. Furthermore, Braga, a prosperous city in the North of Portugal, won recently (2020) a contest for its designation as a *Unesco Creative City of Media Art* [3]. Within this perspective of the cultural-touristic city, the author participates in a working group originated in the above mentioned nomination of Braga.
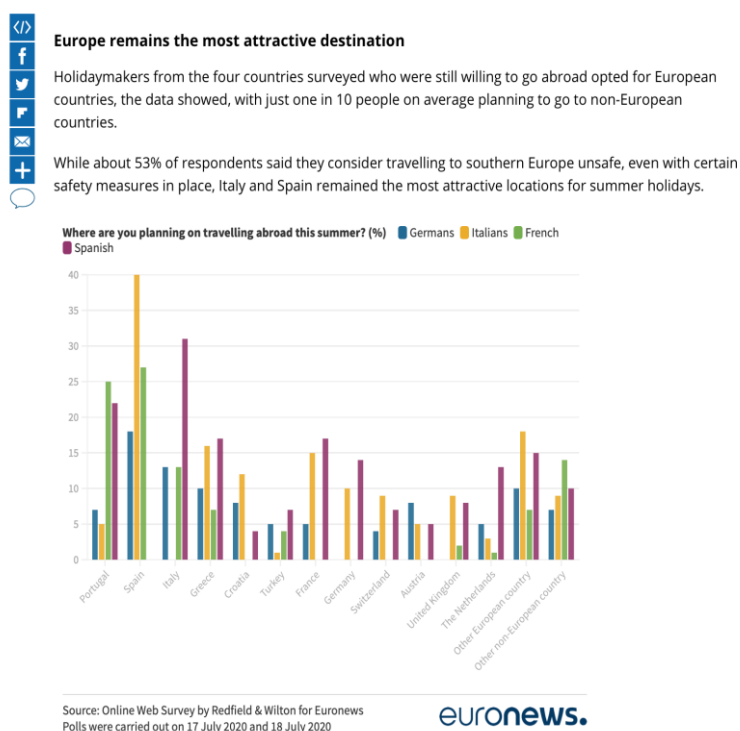

Fig 2. Preferred tourism destinations in the world. Source: Euronews

After the emergence of Corona virus pandemic, things have dramatically changed. The tourism sector entered into a very serious crisis, and the end of it is not yet clear (*Fig. 1*). Global lost revenue is estimated in € 273 billion. Tourist numbers fell by 300 million, which means a 56% drop in comparison with the same period of last year, according to World Tourism Organization-UNWTO [4]. Inside such context, a recent poll (*Fig. 2*) shows some tendencies on preferred tourism destinations in the world, by Germans, Italians, French and Spanish tourists, who were inquired in the beginning of the 2020 summer high tourism season, more precisely in July 17 and 18 [5].

However, the crisis also revealed some partly hidden socioeconomic phenomena: in the central areas of Lisbon, to respond to the exponential demand for tourist accommodation in recent years, many local residents have sold their houses or apartments at low prices and many lodgers have been evicted of its rented floors, by the respective owners. In addition, some homeowners have turned their homes into local Airbnb solutions. Currently, around 55,000 families depend on this lucrative Airbnb business. However, the Covid-19 pandemic has dramatically decreased tourism demand and caused a sudden crisis on Airbnb. Recently, the Mayor of Lisbon criticized the excessive rent growth in the last years and wants to return homes to permanent residents (*Fig. 3*).

Meanwhile, research efforts at Institute of Molecular Medicine in Lisbon (IMM) gave some interesting and practical results, mainly in what regards the development of an innovative mask (*Fig. 4*), that inactivates Corona virus after about 1 hour of utilization, it is washable and usable during a week [6].

Fig 3. The Airbnb crisis, at Lisbon
Source: SIC TV channel, https://sicnoticias.pt Photo credits: Pedro Andrade

RESEARCH: A STRATEGY

And what about the possible contribute of Social Sciences? At Lisbon and in the North of Portugal at University of Minho, within Communication and Society Research Centre, a research team, composed by social scientists, tech people and new media artists, and coordinated by the author of this text, is pursuing a project named *Viral Urban Tourism within Viral Society*. Its purpose is to study the social and cultural impact of Covid-19, on the everyday life of citizens, tourists and migrants, across the urban fabric of Lisbon and Braga. For such aim, the team is deconstructing tourism guides and other social communicative tools, and reconstructing them as *Sociological Touring Guides*, by using apps, e-books, and other social and tech methods and media. The photos presented here are mostly sources made by the author in July 2020 at Fuseta town, in Algarve region, South of Portugal, and belong to his hypermedia collection. Their aim is to exemplify some transformations caused by Covid-19 within everyday life at touristic places. The TV News sources shown in this text, except Figure 4, are photos taken by the author from SIC News TV channel, and some other information was consulted at SIC site (https://sicnoticias.pt)
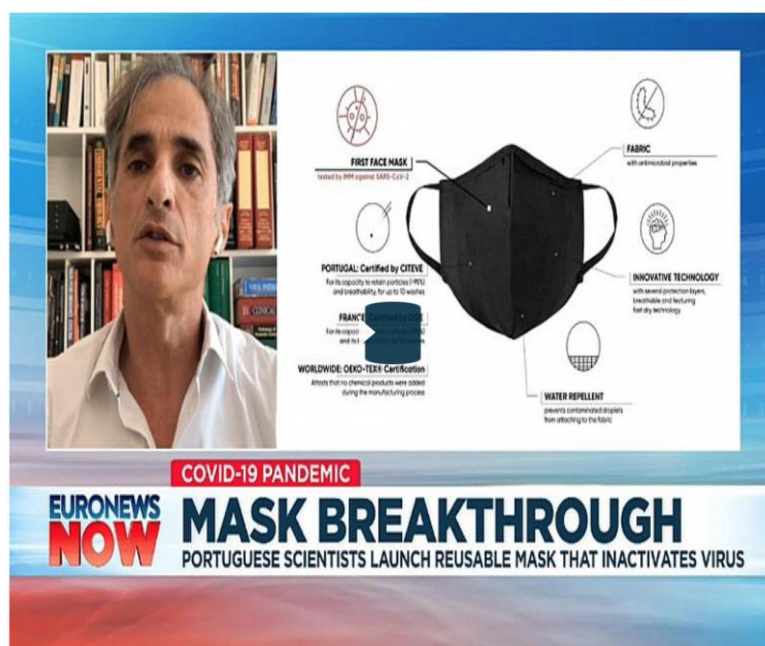
Fig 4. Masks and brains against the virus
Source: Euronews

DEBATE: THEORIES, QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

John Urry [7] comments that nowadays 'everything is on the move': *social mobilities* include flows of capital, work, people, objects, technologies, etc. One of these mobile phenomena is tourism. Urry also wrote a seminal book on the *tourist gaze* social phenomenon [8]. He argues that tourism mobilizes many other activities, e.g. shopping, sport, culture, hobbies, leisure and education. In this process, tourism and tourists' ways of seeing societies and cultures, may act as central elements of global cultural changes. In this book's 2nd edition (2011), named *Tourism 3.0,* he adds new questions such as risks and alternative futures, more case studies and recent sociological methods, e.g. photography and digitization, embodied performances, etc. In fact, tourism constitutes the central configuration of travel since the advent of modernity, according to sociologist Pedro Andrade [9]. And tourism itself must be understood within a conceptual network that relates to what Henri Lefebvre named the 'production if space' [10], within the global city, a concept problematized by Saskia Sassen [11] (cf. *Fig. 5*).

A recent contribution for such debate is the discussion on public art for tourism communication, undertaken by international researchers from USA, France, Spain, Portugal and Brazil, and available in open access [12].

In this perspective, one central question emerges: how to reflect, and empirically analyze, the practices of *urban tourism*, within the framework of urban social mobilities? As a first working hypothesis, it is possible and probable that the new urban mobilities, and in particular cultural tourism, have been profoundly transformed by *locative technologies*, such as mobile digital devices (mobile phones, etc.).
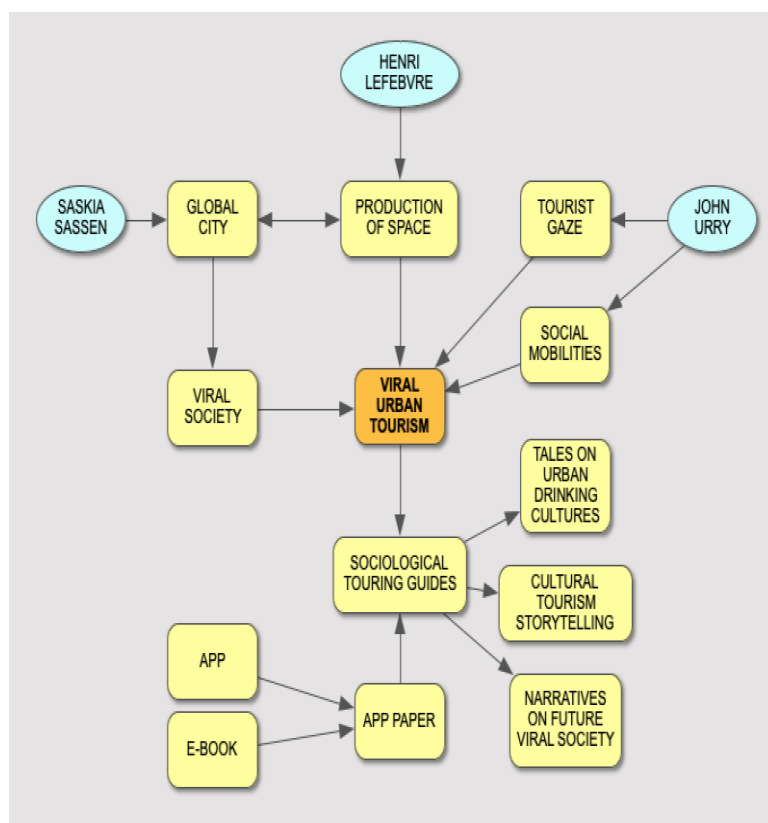
Fig 5. The viral urban tourism debate

Another central question is this one: what impact is Covid-19 having on society and, in particular, on urban tourism? Hypothesis 2 conjectures the following: it is credible that we are entering into a *viral society*, characterized, among other attributes, by an unprecedented economic global crisis, social confinement, social distance and augmentation of uses of the Internet and mobile phones as alternatives for face-to-face interaction. Within such context, the urban tourist, and especially the cultural tourist, are experimenting new ways of relating to the visited societies and cultures, in particular by substituting some practices of face-to-face tourism, by virtual action in cyberspace, e.g. in order to consult content related to his/her travel. In other words, a sort of *viral virtual tourism* is rising today.

Question 3: how this situation will evolve? Hypothesis 3: Progressively, the bewilderment derived from the early stages of the pandemic, may lead to the *remobilization of tourism* activities and of *viral tourists* actions, through hybrid routes between face-to-face journeys and virtual travels.

To corroborate/infirm these conjectures, several methods are previewed: questionnaires, visual interviews considering photo elicitation strategies on a sample of three main social profiles (citizens, cultural tourists and migrants), direct observation through video, and the correspondent content and discourse analysis. Other used methods and media are mentioned below.

TOOLS: GUIDES FOR SOCIAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL TOURS

In such a perspective of *intelligent tourism*, this text essentially presents a *sample of contents* that will be included in *e-books and apps*, to be consulted via locative devices such as the cell phone, by at least three of the most representative profiles of contemporary social audiences: citizens, cultural tourists and migrants. Therefore, these social audiences are partly related with the social profiles above mentioned. Such contents, in addition to historical perspectives and introductory and descriptive comments, focus

mainly on *sociological, cultural and urban themes*, in an essentially interpretative and explanatory stance, with regard to urban social and cultural fabrics (see *Fig. 6*).
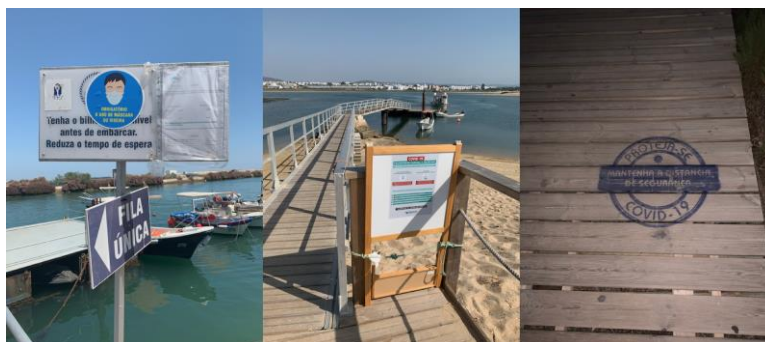

Fig. 6. Knowledge dissemination on Covid-19, at touristic Fuseta town and Ria Formosa beach, Algarve region, South of Portugal
Photos credits: Pedro Andrade

In this way, included materials may be useful, in daily practices, for the above mentioned three segments of the population. In the case of urban tourist activities, and in the current pandemic era generated by Covid-19, such instruments may be consulted by tourists to collect and give their opinion on the necessary information about virtual places to visit and the virtual/virtuous practices to trigger there, and above all to develop a deeper *knowledge* of these places. In other words, not just be informed on the classical *historic content* (heritage, food traditions, etc.), nor only consult descriptive information (how to find tours, hotels, restaurants, bars, etc.). But also read *sociological content/knowledge* explained or interpreted interactively about cities past, present and future. E.g. the social city exposed under the optics of representative drinking urban spaces, as taverns, cafes and bars, within economic, political and cultural optics. Or the city's actual and problematic issues, e.g. its leisure, consumption, culture, arts, transformed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, insofar as these novel tourist routes, both physical and socio-cultural, provide *not only information, but essentially knowledge* about urban and social aspects, they are called *Sociological Tours*, including Sociological Histories and Historical Sociologies of cities.

These touristic paths are as well interactive, as their contents are activated by *hybrimedia methods*, such as *Sociological Comics, Sociological Games, apps, e-books*, etc.

The profiles of Sociological Tours' readers include not just cultural tourists and other urban travelers, but also professional agents at work or at learning, e.g. students, teachers, researchers, etc.

In sum, content to be included in these e-books and apps is mainly shareable and dialogic, such as urbanization strategies and city plans based on citizens knowledge, a paramount condition for collective participation. Later, such content will be integrated into *sociological games* and *sociological cartoons*, which will include texts, images, videos, questionnaire's questions, interviews, reciprocal photographs among tourists, citizens and migrants, games in virtual and augmented reality, devices in Physical Computing, etc.

A prototype of an *app mixed with an e-book* on these matters, was developed in the form of an App Paper, explained below.

METHOD / MEDIA: WHAT IS AN APP PAPER?

An *Appaper* or *App Paper* is an alternative mode of production and of dissemination / presentation of papers at conferences, or at other socio-cultural locations.
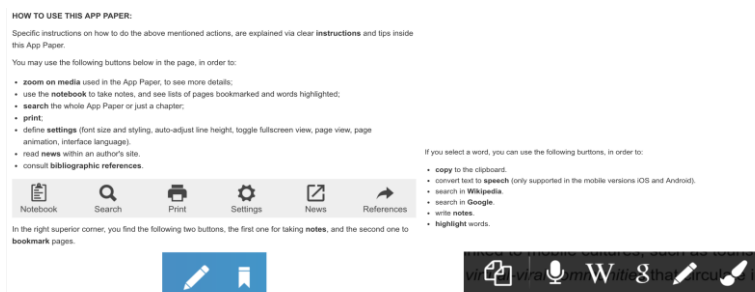

Fig. 7. How to use an App Paper

As for its structure and genre, it consists of an ***interactive app hybridized with an e-book***, where it is possible to read, comment, dialog and even re-write the contents of an author's presentation, e.g. at a congress. In what regards its content, some App Papers are ***sociological e-books***, or ***s-books,*** meaning e-books where its central content is of sociological nature, often articulated with other domains/issues. This is the case of the Appaper named *Viral Cultural Tourism via Mobile Devices: Open Research using Open Methods and Open Media* (*Fig. 7*), which is the first one of its **genre.** Such **App paper** can be freely **downloaded at the site named *Viral Tourism*** [13] . It was made in connection with the Virtual Congress *Connections: Exploring Heritage, Architecture, Cities, Art, Media*, 2020, organized by the University of Kent, at Canterbury, United Kingdom.

The Appaper is available in the following ***interactive formats***: **Mac and Windows desktop apps and e-pub.** This is a 1st version, and each version works as a ***palimpsest***. In other words, new texts of the same book are to be published. In short, at each moment, the reader reads the same book, but different texts of that book. Please note that this App Paper is not necessarily a Sociological Guide, it is mainly a prototype of possible fusions among apps and e-books. However, some media characteristics of App Papers, such as interactivity, may be applied on such touristic Sociological guides.

CONTENTS: SOCIOLOGICAL TOURS FOR CITIZENS, TOURISTS AND MIGRANTS

Within the Portuguese scientific agora, at Lisbon and across the last years, a continuous research was developed in several fronts [14] . Reflections, life stories, interviews, direct observation, content and discourse analysis were produced. This constitutes the base for the content of stories, that are being developed for the modules of Sociological Guides. In what regards the content, it is mainly of socio-economic and cultural nature, but the form or structure may be fictional, historical, sociological, anthropological, etc. Or a mix among them (*Fig. 8)*.

Fig. 8. Contents: drinking cultures, communicative tourism and alternatives
Photo Credits: Pedro Andrade

In other words, the aim of such Sociological Guides is to work as social and Sociological Tours for storytelling about the urban fabric, through narratives on city contexts, events, actors, practices and objects. In sum, these are socio-fictional guides for presenting a Sociological History and a Historical Sociology about touristic cities and other touring sites. In particular, three main themes are already in development: 1. *Urban places and their public cultures*, e.g. social drinking practices. 2. Activities and novel perspectives of *urban tourism*: popular tourism; cultural heritage tourism, mobile tourism, creative tourism, communicative tourism, Tourism 3.0 related with City 3.0, Culture 3.0 and Web 3.0, etc. 3. Impact of *Covid-19 pandemic* on society and on urban tourism and respective alternatives. The photographs in this text testify some empirical work in progress, that sustains the intermedia social stories that will populate Sociological Guides.

Other content illustrations are included in the App Paper above mentioned, including themes discussed in the video presentation shown at the Canterbury Congress 2020.

CONCLUSION: NOW WHAT?

The struggle against Covid-19 needs the cooperation of all stakeholders. At the University of Minho, a sort of *hybrid research* aims to fusion complementary and opposite objects of study, methodologies and researcher's profiles. Moreover, as above mentioned, this paper's reading may be followed by the consultation of an App Paper in electronic format. Among other information and knowledge, in this Appaper are defined, synthetically, some of the concepts that present and represent the emerging Viral Society.

NOTES

[1] World Travel Awards. Accessed January 6, 2020. https://www.worldtravelawards.com/nominees/2019/portugal

[2] Lisbon Green Capital. **Accessed July 20,** 2020.
      https://lisboagreencapital2020.com

[3] Braga Creative City of Media Arts. Accessed March 15, 2020: https://en.unesco.org/creative-cities/braga

[4] World Tourism Organization-Unwto. "International Tourism And Covid-19."
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[5] See Mathieu Pollet, "Majority of French, Germans, Italians & Spanish scrap holiday plans amid coronavirus outbreak – poll". *Euronews*. Accessed July 24, 2020.
https://www.euronews.com/2020/07/29/majority-of-french-germans-italians-spanish-scrap-holiday-plans-amid-coronavirus-outbreak?utm_term=Autofeed&utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Twitter#Echobox=1596001996

[6] Euronews. "Scientists In Portugal Create Reusable Mask That Disables Coronavirus Upon Contact With Fabric*".*
Accessed July 27, 2020.
https://www.euronews.com/2020/07/27/scientists-in-portugal-create-reusable-mask-that-inactivates-coronavirus

[7] For more details, consult John Urry, *Mobilities* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

[8] John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze* (London: Sage, 1990).

[9] The author discusses a typology of the main configurations of travel within modernity and post-modernity/late modernity in the following essay: Pedro Andrade, "Sociology of travel: everyday journeys and nomadic anti-daily life. *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais 37 (1993):* 51. In this text, he also defines the concept of 'critical tourist', who is a traveler originary from a central country, who developed a critical perspective on his own society, e.g. in what regards inequalities between the world's 'centre' and its 'periphery', and sometimes comparing mass tourism travel to a sort of neo-colonialism. Moreover, the 'counter tourist' means a citizen living in a semi-peripherical or in a peripherical country, who practices different or even opposite modes of travel to mass tourism.

[10] Henri Lefebvre, *Du rural à l'urbain* (Paris: Éditions Anthropos, 1970).

[11] Saskia Sassen, *Cities in a World Economy* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1994).

[12] Pedro Andrade and Mário Caeiro (eds), *Lusophone Journal of Cultural Studies* 7,1 (2020), https://rlec.pt.

[13] Pedro Andrade, *Viral Cultural Tourism via Mobile Devices: Open Research using Open Methods and Open Media* **(**Lisbon: Social Web Lab Publishers, 2020).
https://sites.google.com/view/viralculturaltourism

[14] Pedro Andrade, "Cultural e-Tourism depicted by Digital Discourse: the Case of Portuguese Networks of e-Heritage and Discursive Innovation." In *Innovative Perspectives on Tourism Discourse,* ed. Magda Bielenia-Grajewska and Maria Ríos, 1-17 (Hershey: I.G., 2017), 1.

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