



The New Normal: Tourism Research Directions in Finland and Beyond

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In this editorial we would like to point out some of the most recent research trends and discussions in light of the constantly changing tourism and travel circumstances. First, we want to elaborate how the most recent doctoral research in Finland helps to address the changing circumstances. Second, with the return to face-to-face scientific fora, we discuss the research trends through two major scientific conferences, in which we have taken part in summer 2022.

With the pandemic outbreak in 2020, we were told that tourism and travel will be returning to normal in 2022. It has become evident that 2022 was anything but normal. While COVID-19 related travel restrictions have been eased in most countries, it is up to national governments to define under which conditions the borders are crossed. Moreover, we see new travel restrictions and a sanction regime rapidly developing around the world due to the war conflict in Ukraine. These changed and changing travel circumstances are commonly called “the new normal”. It requires rapid adaptations to changes happening around us.

The outbreak of COVID-19 has changed the way we practice tourism, and changed its flows and forms. Simultaneously, destinations had to come up with new ways to reach and attract tourists, while our own home communities have become domestic tourism destinations. Governments have increased social support for people and businesses, due to the pandemic-driven layoffs and service sector closure (Airey et al., 2020). The four introductory lectures in this issue provide insights into the “new normal” in the Finnish context. These four are unrelated at the first glance, but all propose important managerial implications for tourism industries under ongoing societal changes. With the increased online presence of destinations on various social media platforms, the lecture by Xinxin Guo outlines important aspects of how destinations can construct their image online with the use of online review platforms, and how these reviews influence tourists’ perceptions of destination. With the pandemic-driven travel restrictions and the increase in domestic tourism, Evgenia Amey shows how a familiar city site can be perceived differently through fiction, such as when having biographical connections or textual descriptions of Tove Jansson and her works. Meaningful and extraordinary experiences or luxury moments can help tourism service providers to stand out and differentiate themselves from others. Riina Iloranta’s lecture demonstrates that luxury moments can be experienced also in the uncon-

ventional value context, such as in Finland, where the feeling of luxury comes from time for self, others and nature. Elli Vento's research on social tourism in Finland shows the positive outcomes of social holidays on well-being and inclusion of disadvantaged customers. This is of particular importance in light of the economic effects of the pandemic.

Scientific discussions at the Nordic Geographers Meeting (2022) in Joensuu, Finland, focused on the pandemic-driven changes in mobility patterns and forms of consumption as well as equality issues. Biopolitical arrangements of tourism mobility during and post-COVID-19 have attracted scientific attention from several angles. State tourism policies have become intertwined with biopolitics, especially in tourism-dependent destinations. The future of mass tourism and the politics of maintaining consumption have become problematic issues in terms of their impact on climate change and public health implications. Biopolitical experiments with travels to 'COVID-free' tourism spaces have turned out to be ineffective in providing safe (contamination-free) travel. Mobilities in general have become a privilege that is constantly renegotiated under political and economic contingencies.

COVID-19 derived changes in mobilities and rural consumption have been studied from the perspectives of rural-urban interactions, multi-local living, second home use, remote work and emerging forms of location independence. Indeed, border closures and increased domestic tourism consumption have revealed various forms of multi-locality and mobility of people. One of the big questions related to the escape from urban areas during the pandemic in different parts of the world is Who has the right to be in rural areas? (Pitkänen et al., 2020, p. 20). Discussions over rural areas have focused on keeping the rural safe by restricting tourists and second home tourists but allowing seasonal workers. Simultaneously, new ways to trace human mobility and their real-time location at second homes through consumption data as well as questions of crisis communication have been discussed. Pandemic-driven remote work temporal relocations, such as workcations and remote work travel, or permanent ones have become a subject of scientific attention.

The discussions have also revealed the increased use of national parks and green infrastructure, growth of nature-based tourism and rural consumption during the COVID-19. The importance of green environments in a form of urban nature, national parks or other nature-based activities has been studied in relation to its well-being and eudemonic effects, human health, and migrants' integration. Furthermore, the increase of green infrastructure in the cities can not only mitigate greenhouse gas emissions but raise the attractiveness of destinations for tourists. Apart COVID-19 related discussions other issues included sustainable planning for coastal tourism and coastal management, human waste in national parks and pre-pandemic tourism flows.

International Tourism Studies Association conference (ITSA 2022) in Gran Canaria, Spain, on the other hand, focused very much on getting back to the old normal. Gran Canaria as a destination is dependent on tourism and the main goal of the local tourism industry is to get back to the old situation as fast as possible. This is understandable as COVID-19 had a huge impact on the destination, but it raises the question if the time perspective of destinations is long enough. Scientific discussion at the conference focused on or at least paid major attention to the concept of the Metaverse. Metaverse is expected to

become much more than VR or AR, some kind of next-level internet. The possibilities at this point also for tourism seem endless, but it remains to be seen how it materializes. COVID-19 has also been a turning point for tourism research and has brought many new topics to the forefront of research (Gretzel et al., 2020).

All this also means that scientific knowledge is more and more in demand. It is up to the scientific community to find ways to provide valid and reliable knowledge for decision-makers in society. This also requires innovations in scientific processes and communication as the need for knowledge comes fast with rapid changes happening all around us.

References

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