



SAFE TOURISM DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC. MAINTAINING PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH BY OVERCOMING TRAVEL FEARS

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The aim of the paper is to build the way in which the tourism industry, severely affected in 2020, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, must regain the title of leader of the global economy, made possible by returning to travel habits. The arguments that will answer our concern will be presented in detail, using the inductive and deductive method. The study explores the impact of the tourism sector in 2020, the involvement of the authorities in managing the health crisis, the perception of individuals regarding the safety of traveling, but also the reasoning for which travel comes to the physical and mental health of individuals. In fact, we have managed to review an important part of the current literature on the impact generated by coronavirus on the mental and physical condition of individuals. One of the results obtained suggests that, for example, vaccinating the population, while approaching a behavior that is still responsible for the population, can lead to overcoming travel fears, implicitly, resulting in the transition to the long-awaited normalcy.

Key words: tourism, COVID-19 Pandemic, safe tourism, travel fears, tourism recovery.

INTRODUCTION

It is human nature not to stop. Throughout his life, he is in a long process of personal and social development. The traveler intervenes in the anthropological sphere, being understood as a necessity in the defining process of man as an individual in society. Traveling, we discover new lands, we interact with our fellow men, we discover and take part in new customs and traditions. Travel for tourism purposes, not only are beneficial for us in order to obtain relaxation, also helping to consolidate our own information baggage. A healthy development of the individual in society, presupposes, among many others, the possibility to circulate, without any fundamental human right being undermined. Thus, the practice of tourism in safe conditions, especially in the adverse conditions of the outbreak of a pandemic, was a challenge for 2020, but also for years to come.

The year 2019 can be considered to be “the year before the big change”, because most of the economic sectors registered significant increases, of course, tourism also showing this upward trend. There have been scenarios in recent years regarding the emergence of a virus that would have a significant impact worldwide, but who would

have thought that we would see ourselves accomplished so quickly? In February 2018, the World Health Organization (WHO) published an article in which predictions of a possible flu pandemic seemed to prepare us for an inevitable event¹. According to the same source, a severe pandemic could cause millions of deaths and can wipe out more than 1% of global GDP¹. In fact, the virus, which appeared in China's Wuhan province, has caused a huge imbalance among the global economic sectors. In the paper “Potential impact of COVID-19 on GDP and trade: a preliminary assessment”, it is emphasized that in case of a pandemic, the most affected sectors are those related to the production of domestic services, but also tourism services, so that the scenarios predict a 2% drop in global GDP, 2.5% for developing countries and 1.8% for industrialized countries². If such forecasts seemed rather bleak, we need to take a breath of fresh air to prepare for the shock that may arise as a result of the exposure of statistical data generated by the International Monetary Fund on January 26, 2021. Therefore, concretely, it was established that in 2020, globally, the COVID-19 pandemic led to the collapse of GDP by -3.5%³. Moreover, as expected, a number of restrictions have been imposed by various governments around the world in order to slow the spread of this airborne

virus. Thus, on March 11, 2020, following the 118,000 cases in 114 countries, the WHO assessed the medical crisis generated by COVID-19 as a pandemic⁴.

From that moment on, humanity experienced a change that it was difficult to fully understand, and even more so to adapt to. Once they realized the danger posed by the SARS-CoV-2 virus on their own health, uncertainty, insecurity or anxiety became priorities for everyday life. Therefore, the production of this turning point in our lives, meant, unfortunately, a decrease in travel for tourism.

The retrospective of 2020 given by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) highlighted the main negative effects that occurred due to travel restrictions imposed by the current pandemic. International arrivals worldwide decreased by 74% compared to 2019, which would translate into 1 billion fewer international arrivals in 2020⁵. To get a better idea of the state of the tourism sector in 2020, the same source noted that “the collapse of international travel is an estimated loss of \$ 1.3 trillion in export earnings – more than 11 times the loss during the global economic crisis of 2009”⁵. Therefore, as a result of the above, it can be stated that the tourism sector in 2020 showed a much darker trend than the data that were expected to characterize this pandemic year, because on 13 May 2020, the European Commission presented the statement “Tourism and transport in 2020 and beyond”, whereby the decline in international tourism in terms of export earnings was expected to be 60% to 80% compared to 2019, which meant losses between 840 billion and 1.1 trillion EURO⁶.

In this context of not at all encouraging figures, there is the issue of the tourist's perception of travel safety during the pandemic, but also post-pandemic. Thus, the current article, using the inductive and deductive methods, aims to answer a question of major interest, namely: Can travel be safe during the COVID-19 pandemic?

This is the question to which we will be able to outline a prompt answer, which will support both the tourist and the niche tourism.

GOOD HEALTH PREVAILS!

As expected, as soon as the end of December 2019, scientists discovered 27 cases of pneumonia whose cause was unknown⁷, the question marks about the causes of this disease, but also the possible treatments applied for healing have been very topical concerns. On February 11, 2020, the

WHO gave the name “COVID-19” to the disease which, at that time, had settled in the case of 42,708 Chinese patients, of which 1017 registered for death⁸. As the number of Chinese patients diagnosed with the current coronavirus increases, Chinese authorities have begun to express concern that there may be isolated cases in patients in Wuhan, China. The information was taken over online and in the media, and was later disseminated among the masses. Most likely, skepticism about the existence of the virus or the possibility of it spreading worldwide was among the main reactions among the masses of people from all over the world. However, according to the WHO, as of February 11, 2020, there were 393 cases of COVID-19 in 24 countries⁸. This has generated a global health crisis, with consequences that are difficult to weigh in the early stages of the pandemic.

The management of this new turning point in which humanity was, brought us to the threshold of making critical decisions. As not much information was known about the SARS-CoV-2 virus, many countries around the world have taken a number of safety measures to slow the rate of infection. Wearing protective masks, social distance of at least 1.5 meters between individuals, avoiding crowded spaces, limiting access to certain places, areas, larger areas and until the temporary closure of the borders of certain states, have meant joint efforts in the desire to go back to the post-pandemic period or overcoming these times that are troubling our lives.

We consider that no matter how "wrinkled" the form that any economic sector may take as a result of this pandemic, the health of society, implicitly of individuals, is primarily the number one priority, a priority that the institutions dealing with the management of this pandemic must not miss it. What would happen if, as of tomorrow, society became infected in as large a number as possible with this virus, the actors in the health system no longer being able to keep up with the diseases? Who would treat our weaknesses, who would make an effort to research, to discover new treatment methods or potential healing serums? What would the common man do, being put in front of an enemy impossible to see with the naked eye, especially to be explained and understood ?! There are many such questions in mind everywhere, scenarios of the emergence and management of potential plagues worldwide even before the advent of coronavirus, and there will certainly be more.

Fortunately, we live in times that are characterized by continuous technological booms.

Technical and scientific advances characterize the 21st century, as evidenced by the collective effort of researchers, culminating in the prompt response of major pharmaceutical companies, to support the emergence of life-saving vaccines. A first ray of hope was sent to us from American lands, more precisely from the factory in Chesterfield, Missouri, where the pharmaceutical corporation Pfizer, Inc., in partnership with the German company BioNTech, established the first doses of COVID-19 vaccine⁹. On November 18, 2020, the giant Pfizer issued a statement in which, together with its partner Biontech, it was possible to successfully complete the third stage of the clinical study aimed at increasing the efficacy of the COVID-19 vaccine based on mRNA, BT162B¹⁰. The third phase of the tests began on July 27, 2020, with 43661 subjects¹⁰. Serum efficacy results have been shown to be successful. In patients without a previous SARS-CoV-2 infection, who were also given a second dose of this vaccine, the serum efficacy rate was 95%¹⁰. In fact, these figures were obtained 7 days after the second dose, among those detected with and without previous SARS-CoV-2 infection¹⁰.

Serums against COVID-19 were also developed by other companies (Table 1), among which the Moderna mRNA-1273 vaccine proved to be one of the most significant, 94.1%¹¹ efficacy in the third phase of research, while Competitive efficacy was also demonstrated in the case of NVX-CoV2373 serum (89.3% efficacy rate)¹².

We find that the road to normalcy is beginning to take shape. As soon as the number of people vaccinated against COVID-19 increases from one day to the next, it will not be long before we can talk about a more effective control of cases of diseases. According to the WHO, the current vaccination aims to achieve an “immunization of the herd”¹³. However, in the same communiqué published on December 31, 2020, the idea was supported that the immunization of the herd varies according to each disease, so that the need for vaccinations in the case of measles is 95%, in the case of polio 80% , while the percentage allocated to coronavirus remains unknown because it requires time, study and additional resources¹³.

Therefore, being in this context of continuous vaccination, as expected, the safety measures experienced a certain “relaxation”. Many countries of the world have given up the temporary closure of borders, thus facilitating the movement of individuals, but still respecting a preventive, responsible behavior. From now on, the attention

of the authorities must be directed to the gradual return to the natural course of things, before the pandemic.

Table 1

Efficacy of the main COVID-19 vaccines, until February 24, 2021

Name	Primary developers	Country of origin	Efficacy rate in phase 3 of tests	Data published on	Source
BNT162b2	Pfizer/BioNTech	Multinational	95%	Nov 18, 2020	<u>A</u>
Moderna (mRNA-1273)	Moderna	US	94,1%	Jan 25, 2021	<u>B</u>
Sputnik V	Gamaleya Research Institute, Acellena Contract Drug Research and Development	Russia	91,6%	Feb 02, 2021	<u>C</u>
NVX-CoV2373	Novavax	US	89,3%	Jan 28, 2021	<u>D</u>
AstraZeneca-University of Oxford (AZD1222)	BARDA, OWS	UK	70%	Nov 27, 2020	<u>E</u>
JNJ-78436735	Johnson & Johnson	Netherlands, US	66%	Jan 29, 2021	<u>F</u>
Convidic ea	CanSino Biologics	China	65,7%	Feb 08, 2021	<u>G</u>
CoronaVac	Sinovac	China	50,4%	Jan 15, 2021	<u>H</u>

However, is it likely that people are not reluctant to look at this whole stage of our existence? Is it possible to raise the issue of emotional shocks that disrupt individuals' perceptions of pandemic travel?

MAINTAINING PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH BY OVERCOMING TRAVEL FEARS

Undoubtedly, the imbalances in our lives have not stopped occurring following the expansion of the coronavirus. Consider that the COVID-19

pandemic was officially declared on March 11, 2020⁴. From then until the time of research on this paper, almost a year has passed, a year that has left its mark on our mental and physical condition. To some extent, it is easy for us to express certain personal beliefs and opinions, as we have fully lived the chore of the days spent in our own homes, distancing ourselves from friends and places dear to us.

The principle that underpinned the changes in society, following the onset of the pandemic, were related to protecting the health of individuals. Let us think that once we were socially distant, man suffered in silence, between the walls of a room. In general, the health security measures applied by most governments have, among other things, led to imbalances in mental health. A study conducted in China between January 31 and February 2, 2020, on a sample of 1210 respondents from 194 Chinese cities, revealed the main mental problems that occurred during the pandemic¹⁴. Therefore, 53.8% of respondents rated the psychological impact of the outbreak as moderate or severe; 16.5% reported moderate to severe depressive symptoms; 28.8% reported moderate to severe anxiety symptoms; and 8.1% reported moderate to severe stress levels¹⁴. In fact, according to a study published in *Jama Internal Medicine*, the sequelae that will occur in individuals physically and socially distanced due to COVID-19, will be highlighted by increases in anxiety and depression, substance use, and loneliness and domestic violence, they will also be fully felt¹⁵. Moreover, child abuse can also occur¹⁵. Centers of Disease Control and Prevention draws attention to the implications of stress in our lives (Fig. 1).

Imbalances can also occur with the consumption of tobacco¹⁶ or alcohol¹⁷, which would lead to a number of inconveniences in the treatment of the current coronavirus¹⁷. Travel for tourism can be beneficial for people suffering from emotional instability. By moving to a place other than home, for tourism, we look at new horizons, meet new people, admire their customs and traditions, taking part in a different lifestyle from everyday life. Welfare will prevail, thus relaxing us, putting worries aside, rediscovering ourselves. Getting a mood that helps us see the positive in the world around us, will be the result of those successful tourist experiences.

Through a brief reflection on this gloomy image of society during the COVID-19 pandemic, we find that yes, the basis of these repercussions is the appearance of coronavirus, but travel restrictions

have imposed damage to the spectrum of individual health.

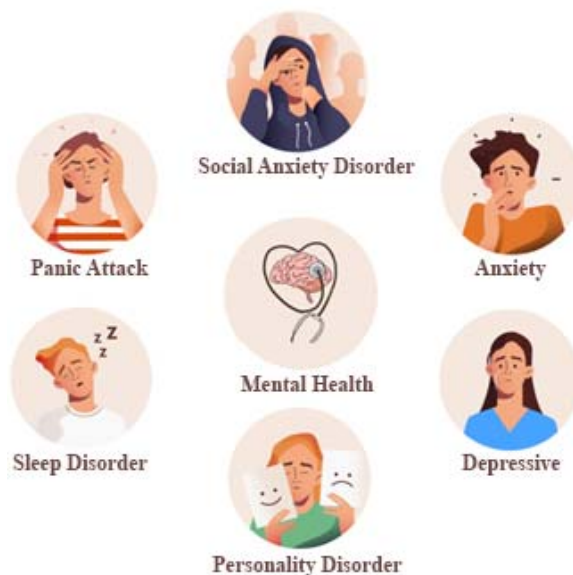


Figure 1. The implications of stress in daily life during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a result of quarantine or mobility restrictions, problems related to the physical health of individuals have also been encountered. Working from home or studying inside one's own home have become measures that society has had to adapt to. In this context, being aware of the imbalances that have occurred, and that affect the physical health of individuals, the authorities have expressed their interest in coming to our aid. Thus, the WHO recommends that 150 minutes of moderate physical activity or 75 minutes of intense physical activity take place each week, and even a combination of these is encouraged¹⁸. "Stay physically active during self-quarantine" is the name of the brief guide published by the WHO, which encourages the practice of simple, basic physical exercises at home¹⁹, but also some food and nutrition²⁰ tips for people in self-quarantine and isolation.

Certainly all these tips are beneficial for the minimum maintenance of your health, but not enough. As the current vaccines developed have an efficacy rate against COVID-19 of over 90% (reference to the sources in Table 1), the authorities need to continue to manage the spread of coronavirus effectively and promptly, but gradually making the transition to relaxation. control of restrictive measures. In the next chapter

we will present our own vision as a result of the researched, regarding the possibility in which tourism, which involves undertaking the travel of individuals outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes²¹, against the background of the current state of health alert, it can be safe to be practiced at the same time, helping to maintain the physical and mental health of individuals, by overcoming the fears of travel.

THE NEED FOR TOURIST TRAVEL, A CONDITIONING OF OUR EXISTENTIALITY

Take into account the fact that physical health also maintains mental health. Whether we are talking about traveling or doing physical maintenance exercises, these aspects should not be neglected in any way. In this context, one of the topics of this paper intervenes, namely the possibility of practicing safe tourism in times of pandemic, and to highlight the fact that it is a condition in the process of maintaining and developing a healthy physical and mental state.

In order to demonstrate that travel patterns have a positive impact on the physical health of individuals, Lee J. Timothy and colab., followed 28 thematic studies to find promising results. Therefore, out of the total number of participants, 70% supported the idea that it is important to have a natural intake of food, while 26% expressed their beliefs that they had an increased appetite, digestion also improving²². Moreover, the feeling of natural energy, the feeling of health and the increase of activity and body movement were suggested by 40% to 47% of participants²².

In fact, the importance of going out in the open air, far from the polluted air of big cities, was also discussed in the paper “Mental health key to tourism infrastructure in China’s new megapark”, noting that people in China suffer from high stress, but which can be alleviated by spending time in natural environments²³. Thus, we find that there is the possibility of practicing a form of niche tourism, which can be adapted to these pandemic times.

Domestic tourism is defined by the UNWTO as “tourism comprising domestic tourism and incoming tourism, ie the activities of resident and non-resident visitors to the reference country as part of domestic or international tourism travel”²¹. Against the background of a good management of

the current pandemic, taking into account the health safety measures that have experienced some relaxation due to the appearance of sera against COVID-19, we consider that domestic tourism is able to meet the tourist demand as well as the tourist providers, severely affected by the pandemic turmoil. However, domestic tourism should be limited to the possibility for tourism activities within a country to be undertaken only by its residents. This measure should not be perceived as a restriction on the free movement of man, but as a “precautionary measure”. Recently, on February 8, 2021, the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control presented 3 variants of the SARS-CoV-2 virus mutation, with significant risk of concern²⁴(Fig. 2).

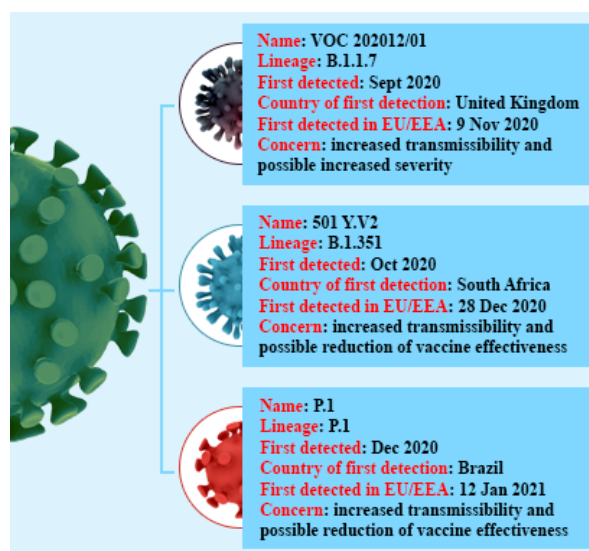


Figure 2. Mutation of SARS-CoV-2: current variants of concern (Data available on 8 February 2021).

Source: Data taken from ²⁴.

In principle, we note that all three mutations have occurred on three different continents, namely Europe, Africa and South America, with the common feature being increased transmissibility and the possibility of increased severity. In fact, there is a possibility that the 501 Y.V2 and P.1 mutation may reduce the effectiveness of vaccination²⁴.

Moreover, given the information presented above, we consider it vitally important to encourage the practice of domestic tourism only by the residents of the country concerned. We understand that there are countries in the world where, despite the significant tourism potential, GDP per capita is not enough to satisfy the ability of residents to travel. In these cases, governments should take care of the financial support issues in order to overcome the pandemic crisis. In the

European Union, for example, it is unlikely to raise the issue of poor financial situations among residents (Big GDP per capita: Luxembourg = 260; Ireland = 193; Denmark = 130; Netherlands = 128; Austria = 126 etc.), GDP per capita in 2019 ranking at the bottom of the ranking of countries in the South and East of the continent (Low GDP per capita: Bulgaria = 53; Croatia = 65; Greece = 67, Latvia = 69; Slovakia = 70 etc.)²⁵.

In domestic tourism, the practice of sustainable tourism, for example, would mean the chance to undertake safe travel. Following a study aimed at analyzing the safety measures suggested by the European Commission, it was concluded that travel for tourism purposes can be started, with a lower risk of infection with the SARS-CoV-2 virus, due to the lack of tourist congestion²⁶, but taking into account criteria such as: restoring safe traffic without restrictions and reopening internal borders; safe restoration of transport; resumption of tourist services with minimized health risks; use of digital technology; protecting human rights. Moreover, the same study strengthened personal concerns about the possibility of overcoming insecurity and uncertainty in the development of tourism activities during the pandemic, by returning man to his origins, namely communion with nature and, by extension, self-covering²⁶.

CONCLUSION

We consider all the objectives of this study to have been successfully met. A brief retrospective of 2020, a year severely affected economically and socially by the COVID-19 pandemic, made us understand the delicate situation we all witness, day by day, and whose inconveniences give rise to internal turmoil, affecting our physical and mental condition. Our findings highlight that further safety measures applied by governments, in order to control the rate of infection with the current coronavirus, must be observed, all the more so as the emergence of a series of COVID-19 vaccines has led to a relaxation of, therefore, by maintaining a preventive behavior, we tend towards the naturalness of the post-pandemic period.

Both mental and physical health were severely tested in 2020, due to fears of travel, self-quarantine or isolation at home. The literature has identified the negative impacts generated by this period, and the results obtained from our counts have highlighted the reasons why the practice of

tourism plays a vital role in maintaining social, physical and mental health. In fact, this study presents a vision that can be perceived as "austerity", and perhaps not to everyone's liking, on how tourism can be exercised safely during the pandemic, as a result of the practice of domestic tourism, especially sustainable tourism, only by the residents of the country concerned.

Each of us has the obligation to reflect intensely on this stage of our existentiality, the current decisions regarding the practice of tourism must be taken for rational reasons, not leaving nostalgia to envelop our judgment, regarding the differences between post-pandemic and current tourism.

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