

# Virtual Tourism as a new Mass Media

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**Abstract — During the sixties, tourism has turned into a mass movement. By comparison with the mass media, we can identify all basic characteristics of the latter: a location where the message is elaborated to be then spread through specific channels of distribution bearing in mind the same goals. Moreover, tourism as mass media allows the "target" to check the information on location during the trip, a kind of feed back that makes the information the more trustworthy. Virtual tourism has brought new challenges**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

THE topic “Visions of Sustainability “ of ATLAS annual conference entailed me to ask myself which is my vision on that subject. After a moment of meditation I found out that I have none. So, I started to ponder over. From all the questions I asked myself and I realized that I have chosen some:

- What is tourism?
- What is sustainability?
- How can tourism be connected with sustainability?

I stop myself here, as the answers were quite unusual. The first one is about the meaning of “tourism”.

### I. WHAT IS “TOURISM”?

Is tourism just a nowadays activity or has “travel” enlarged so far its meanings that we have to determinate the meaning of these terms?

Main notice: the gap between different countries allows me to state that tourism (in its classical meaning) is only for rich countries and people: we can not talk about tourism in Ethiopia, or Bangladesh, or Afghanistan; there we can find travels of some minorities.

More complexes are the situations in the former socialist countries where, for a couple of decades people have enjoyed mass tourism.

The main document after Rio might be “The Earth Council – Agenda 21 for the Travel and Tourism Industry: Toward Environmental Sustainable Development” “ of the WTO and WTTC.

I shall elicit that the results on protecting environment (natural or the one built by men) are much numerous than those concerning the maintaining of social and individual health on the faster nowadays and coming reality.

Was there and is tourism a tool to offer social peace in the developed countries for their working classes? Or must tourism protect the population against the nowadays stress

and get it ready for resuming again working (also only in the developed countries)?

How can it be considered a “tool” of personal and mass “sustainability”?

Term definition: This compels me to look about the meaning of the term “tourism”.

People use to think of good times, leisure and lack of work when saying “tourism”. Is “tourism” just a way of spending free time? There are a lot of official or officious definitions. The variety of the definitions might thus lead us to consider that “tourism” can be any trip made by anyone with any goal in view (including “etc.” of the WTA definition). Therefore might terms like emigrations, illegal emigration, sales of goods, foreign students also fall into this category? Can this “way of defining” tourism make us consider all travels of all people and all their movements on account of war, famine, illegal emigration, political refugees, sales of goods etc. and last but not least travels for “tourism purposes”?

All this being said, it is hard to admit that a sector of the world economy with an important turnover, which involves one of three inhabitants of the Earth self-defines itself, by the term “tourism”. This is why we considered it necessary to expand the notion of tourism as we are going to use it further on, the broad meaning of the term, because the basic characteristics of tourism are movement, direct contact with a new space, a different “reality”.

Let’s add the statistics’ problems: someone coming to Vladivostok is regarded as coming to Europe, many illegal emigrants are traveling with tourist passports etc.

But still this is not the subject of our theme. Plunging into history I have found out:

## II. A NEW OUTLOOK ABOUT TOURISM ACCORDING TO ITS “HISTORICAL ARCHIVES”:

Looking to Europe’s history we found out along the centuries anything that people coming to Europe, going around or just moving from one place to another inside Europe. Each with his own business: to make fortune, to robe some rich people or places, to settle some dispute with others... After 1500 the „travels”, began to have one origin mainly: Europe. And one declared purpose: to Christianize the savage people for the salvation of their souls. What had determined this process? Maybe the over population of Europe but also the large number of opinions and variety of believes.

Mainly after 1700, after the great geographical discoveries some of the Europeans felt too tight the Old World and crossed the Atlantic to meet a new chance. They “cleaned up” a large territory and built a new society for themselves based on “present” on competition and on the slogan “in God we trust”

And they did it! The „fretting” of the new colonists is genetically: they built a vast economy, a high life standard; but once that has been done they looked outside to find new opportunities. And they started to „ export” their way of life. And this put them face to face with other peoples.

They had worked hard to arrive here. The industrialization obliged the owners to take steps to protect the population in all the developed countries. The Americans were much more skillful. By the beginning of last century Ford had looked for a solution to make his business profitable: car production. He needed to produce a lot of them but the buying power was fable. So he decided to increase the wages of his own workers. This will change the whole economic system not only in America but also in the whole world. The directness (or may be the lack of profoundness) of the “American style”, which is based on the power of the USD determined them to adopt a new God: the car. The highways are covering US in order to satisfy the fretting and the restlessness of this people of immigrants. The wide space of US got to be traveled democratically and easily included by the working class. As the quantity brings small profits but numerous they start to build hotels, motels, restaurants, service stations etc. for the new kind of “workers”: the tourists. People started to work hard a whole working week to spend a weekend: but during the weekends other people (or the same) worked to serve the tourists and the tourists money multiplied and accelerated labor and profits.

A new social phenomenon was born: the mass tourism. But only for the rich countries (and, for some time, for the socialist ones, as a result of the competition between systems)!

- Was mass tourism a way to push the economy?
- Was mass tourism a way to reward the peoples of the Western countries?
- Was tourism a tool of maintaining the physical health in a world of growing stress?

The answer is YES.

After the 2<sup>nd</sup> WW there were a lot of young men who were dismissed of the army and had to go home; but their women were working in their former factories. There was a need to find an issue for the labor market. Some of the people got into the mass tourism industry: to serve the occupation armies, to serve the working class... earning not enough for a fine living but satisfactory for a normal life. More, there were huge investments made in the aviation industry. And the people working in that sector were top qualified. And the cold war was getting near. A solution had to be found out: cheaper charter flights. And IATA took the charge to open the skies over the border through the “liberties of the air” and to make new rules for airfares.

### III. TOURISM AS MASS MEDIA:

Some major characteristics of tourism as mass media, some attributes in this respect: during the sixties, tourism has turned into a mass movement. By comparison with the mass media, we can identify all basic characteristics of the latter: a location where the message (information) is elaborated to be then spread through specific channels of distribution bearing in mind the same goals. Moreover,

tourism as mass media allows the "target" to check the information on location during the trip, a kind of feed back that makes the information the more trustworthy. The phenomenon is similar in all the three main fields of tourism activity: incoming, outgoing and domestic. We may therefore consider tourism as a means of mass communication.

This allows me to state: "Since a very young age, the child has been getting accustomed to holidays. Then, out of desire, alluring brochures to the holiday itself, we create the image, the illusion of happiness. We sell to them their remembrances. We are endowed with most effective means of persuasion. This is the result of our being continuously in the immediate contact with life and reality, but the reality as we present it".

Tourism is a means of mass communication. Of all mass media it is the most powerful one due to its range and especially its force: it is governed by the "principle of Apostle Thomas: touching is believing! This force is being ignored because it doesn't bring a quick return on investments; the future is sacrificed for the sake of the present. The power to awaken the sense of history and values is lacking.

- Tourism is a means of communication as it facilitates:
- transmission of information in view of a predetermined scope.
  - contact of the "target" with a certain culture / society with a great potential to influence shaping the targets view on the subject.
  - proves and supports a certain standard of living as a result of a long-term social contract

Summing up, we may conclude that tourism, both in the "classical" and "broad" meaning of the world is a very powerful means of information transfer about "communities, people, their history, present and future by direct contact and therefore very effective. Involving a great number of people and having a mass character, this channel of information distribution has come to be considered a very powerful and persuasive means of communication.

And this is straggly connected with “sustainability” that part which we call “the life of groups (social living) and individuals”. But once again only for the rich countries! For the poor ones just a dream or a chimera!

### VI. WHAT IS “SUSTAINABILITY”:

To be honest, I asked myself what I mean by sustainability. To my surprise I find out that: When talking about sustainability we use to call into attention several topics that I shall group on two categories:

- the nature and the man made environment
- the life of groups ( social living ) and individuals both of them in interaction.

First observation: we have a wider literature about the first but fewer about the last.

Second observation: people were afraid of men' action on the nature for a long period; in Antiquity, Middle Age, and modern times: the closer we are, the more intense the anxiety is; maybe as the information is larger. Now, we can call the solutions to this fear as “sustainability”.

Third observation: if we can observe improvements on nature and men made' environment (like cleaning areas of pollution, non-polluting industries, conservation of resources, etc), it is much harder to see the changes of the matter on social life. I shall cite, for the last, the translation of the protests from "green peace" to "globalization".

Key observation: when teaching economics we focus on economies during peace time. Very few manuals about war economy, its rules and management etc. And also, of similar importance, about the time of transition to the war economy or to the peace economy. I'm pointing out that this state of the economy takes more than half of the time and energies of mankind. And mankind has just started the war against terrorism, a war as long as it needs to be won. This is bad for tourism. Can issues be founded? The WTA state that the tourism activities increased this year in spite of the cost for protection and the fear of tourists. No more argument!

Forth observation: the development of the production and distribution system is such a speedy one that the human being and the human societies can hardly keep the rhythm with. We generally agree that "sustainability" is at least of the same importance for the human being health and social long time harmonious development, as preserving the nature.

#### V. POSSIBLE OPTIONS TO USE TOURISM AS MASS MEDIA TO SUPPORT THE SUSTAINABILITY PROCESS

The "City of Babel" is burdened with information. "Touching" the reality might lead to a common language. Tourism can avoid the classic mass media's manipulation and sustain the safe mind of younger generations.

At the horizon of 21st century a global world is outlining. It is based on information (which shall become the very "skeleton" of human world), the system of wealth (capitals, financial in and out outflows etc.), economic system (which will be more interconnected), politics (which is bound to salvage human permanence, the only rescue being collective endeavors and open dialogue) and the parallel world of images that will configure a new cultural environment. Communities (ethos), people have only two choices left: either to devour themselves after the principle "homo homini lupis" (a principle with strong European roots) or to lay the foundation of a new global "empire" of goodwill and love (the Christian principle, of European origin as well). It will be very difficult for Europe, for its communities (ethos) and people to keep up its status in the tough competition at the turn of the millennium. And precisely tourism as mass media (both in its classic and informal version, the latter being the subject of present argument) shall be a conclusive evidence, a tangible proof for the world and deeds that Europeans will suggest to people all over the world. Through it, anyone, of whatever community, will be able to rediscover the European value of the New Testament (Will) and as Apostle Thomas, touch and believe reality within a new dimension, a parallel world, by tourism.

Purposes that can be reached by using tourism as mass media for sustainability process:  
in the tourism business

- to get more jobs from the incoming, the outgoing or the domestic activities
- to develop certain areas, activities or means of production
- to rise the standard of living and / or cut down social costs, for instance: by developing balneary-climatic therapies in spas the consumption of chemical medicine will decrease
  - to turn weekends into earning days
  - in political or social areas:
- win sympathy or interest
- offer compensation as a reward or escape way
- the opposite of the first two assertions
  - to avoid using tourism a mass media for manipulation

#### VI CONCLUSIONS

I have started to study tourism from another point of view: as a means of mass communication. As we have seen, the area is huge and there is no such thing as a scientific research in this field.

In a global world we have to live globally. But integration cannot be achieved without learning the rules of the world tourism, without learning and respecting its rules of conduct. Especially since we cannot ignore the fact that the outcome of tourism stretches out towards the future. The perceptions of the present sublimate, remembrances are part of the past, a past that will influence future actions. Tourism is not only a lecture about others but it also determines what attitude we will have towards the others, how we will live together. Our world, the one created by the producers of tourism is a global empire, a single community: the human race, presented with all its distinguishing elements, with its past, its present and its hopes.

The way we present the world we are simultaneously physicians and wizards and businessmen. And now, as the world is shaking under the desire for power and greatness, under blood, famine or disease we find ourselves among the few ones capable to heal the wounds. This is why I think we should ponder over this new dimension of our craft, the outcome of our actions. In the struggle for the money, glory, power or organizational perfection we shouldn't break that imaginary vow of Esculap we ought to have made before we set off in this business.

And this means sustainability: the safe life of the human race (at least of rich countries)

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