Coronavirus (and other problems):
2020, a dark year for global tourism

By Anne Gombault,
Professor of Management,
Director of the Creative Industries Culture Expertise Centre and
the MSc in Arts & Creative Industries Management at KEDGE

The coronavirus health crisis, tracked statistically in real time by Johns Hopkins University, is hitting the global economy hard and the tourism industry most of all. The World Tourism Organization (WTO) is expecting a drop in tourism revenue of 300 to 500 billion dollars in 2020, up to one third of the 1,500 billion generated in 2019. France could lose out on up to 40 billion euros per quarter. Millions of jobs in the sector are under threat worldwide. Anne Gombault and her co-authors Claire Grellier Fouillet and Jérémy Lemarié analyse the drastic consequences of the crisis for global tourism, the strategic issues that it emphasises and the opportunity for transformation and learning that it offers.

Structural factors amplifying the crisis

First factor: At the start of the crisis, the most affected tourists were the Chinese, the biggest spenders far ahead of the Americans.

Second factor: the crisis then hit the top global destination - Europe. In 2018 the continent welcomed 672 million tourists, half of the world's international arrivals. One third of these tourists travel in Italy, France and Spain, all of which are among the 6 countries most affected by coronavirus, with popular destinations such as Venice, Florence, Paris and Milan.

The third factor is slower to arrive but will probably be harder hitting, the process of deciding whether to book holidays. This is a risky decision due to the nature of the tourism service: trying before buying is not possible and it is a significant investment that requires searching for information and comparison of prices and destinations. The entire sector has entered a negative growth phase with between 3% and 12% fewer tourists depending on the areas according to the World Tourism Organization.

Crisis a marker of general strategic issues for tourism

Although the coronavirus crisis has short-term destructive effects on the tourism industry, this pandemic episode may also be seen as the consequence of a vulnerable condition rather than the start of a period of instability. Research is underway into challenging the practices of the tourism industry and is drawing attention to a succession of issues related to population movements as part of leisure activities.

- The first issue is the surprisingly poor risk management in an industry which should be highly reliable.
- A second related issue is that of viral globalisation. Just like tourists, diseases cross borders, travel thousands of kilometres and put the most vulnerable populations in danger.
- The research presents the third issue, overtourism, as one of the biggest problems of mass tourism. This involves too high volumes of holidaymakers which damages ecosystems, sites, living conditions for residents and the experience for visitors.
- Finally, another problem concerns pollution caused by activity. This includes single use of consumer goods by passengers in transit and road transport, but it is carbon emissions from civil aviation that comes in for the heaviest criticism.
An opportunity for tourism innovation

The Covid-19 crisis raises the question of the direction of globalised tourism and is an opportunity to rethink the tourism industry from a critical perspective. There are several areas for potential transformation.

The general idea would be to move towards responsible, sustainable and socially innovative tourism, structured around the (non-transferable) identity of the areas and giving them a boost while respecting the quality of life of residents and the memorable experience of the trip.

In order to avoid overtourism, tourist hotspots should take measures to regulate flows as is already done in places like Barcelona, Cinque Terre, Venice, Dubrovnik, Iceland, etc.

Creative and more inclusive tourism should be developed to avoid a concentration of activity on the hotspots and to involve residents in the activity. Visitors can participate in cultural and creative experiences that reflect the identity of the area and create something jointly between residents and tourists.

The trend for staycations and slow tourism should be encouraged. Travellers see local tourism as a good way to maximise holiday time by reducing travel time which also benefits the environment and saves money.

E-tourism, which has been developing since the 2000s, has boomed since the start of the crisis in China with acceleration of digital heritage, online broadcasting of shows and events streamed live over the internet. Operators are developing quality digital content to avoid crowds of travellers.

The coronavirus crisis could revolutionise practices and help to accelerate the transformation of an industry which is still very conservative.


Anne Gombault and Claire Grellier Fouillet are at your disposal should you have any requests for an interview or coverage on this current issue.

About Anne Gombault:
Anne Gombault is a professor of management at KEDGE Business School, where she directs the Creative Industries Culture Expertise Centre in Bordeaux and the MSc Arts & Creative Industries Management in Paris. She is also pedagogical manager of the French part for KEDGE of the Franco-Chinese Institute of Arts and Design Management in Shanghai, which has just opened in partnership with the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) for the Chinese part, KEDGE and Paris-Sorbonne University for the French part. Her research focuses on organisational identity, behaviour and strategy of arts and cultural organisations and creative industries in general. She has carried out studies for various institutions, including the European Union, the French Ministry of Culture, the Louvre Museum, regions and cities in various regions of the world. Her work is published in France and abroad. Among other projects, she has contributed to the contemporary organisational history at the Louvre Museum. Her most recent article, appearing in the International Journal of Arts Management, describes the crisis of the fire at Notre Dame cathedral. She is an honorary board member of the International Association of Arts and Cultural Management. She is a board member of Musée Guimet, the National Museum of Asian Arts in France, and the Aquitaine Culture endowment fund.

About Claire Grellier Fouillet:
Claire Grellier Fouillet is a programme coordinator for the Creative Industries Culture Expertise Centre at KEDGE Business School. She mainly teaches MSc Arts & Creative Industries Management. She is studying for her PhD in Management at University of Bourgogne, under the supervision of Dominique Bourgeon-Renault and Anne Gombault. Her thesis looks at how innovative tourism entrepreneurs are behaving in France. Her research and teaching interests include: entrepreneurship, innovation, digitalisation, creative and sustainable tourism, creative industries.

About KEDGE:
KEDGE Business School is a benchmark French business school with 4 campuses in France (Paris, Bordeaux, Marseilles, and Toulon), 3 overseas (2 in China, in Shanghai and Suzhou, and 1 in Africa in Dakar) and 3 partner campuses (Avignon, Bastia and Bayonne). The KEDGE community is made up of 14,800 students (25% of whom are international students), 192 full-time lecturers (44% of whom are international), 291 international academic partners and 70,000 alumni around the world. KEDGE offers a portfolio of 36 training programmes in management and design for students and industry professionals. It also provides customised educational programmes for businesses at national and international levels. KEDGE is AACSB-, EQUIS- and AMBA-accredited, and is a member of the Conférence des Grandes Ecoles. It is also recognised by the French government, with covered programmes, and has obtained the EESPIG label. KEDGE is ranked 31st by the Financial Times in the European Business School rankings and 39th globally for its Executive MBA.
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KEDGE Press Contacts:
Julien Ravier Tel. +33 (0) 671 535 161 / julien.ravier@kedgebs.com
Titiane Lugand Tel. +33 (0) 556 846 343 / titiane.lugand@kedgebs.com
Aurélie Prouillac Tel. +33 (0) 556 845 509 / aurelie.prouillac@kedgebs.com
Kimberley Borg Tel. +33 (0) 603 343 316 / kimberley.borg@kedgebs.com