

Forum: General Assembly Second Committee

Issue: The Question of the Effects of Mass Tourism on the Environment

Student Officer: Ms. Noora Hägg

Position: President of the General Assembly Second Committee

Introduction

Mass tourism¹ is a globally recognized problem that presents multiple complex questions. Mass tourism affects the environment on diverse levels and affects biodiversity and cultures intertwined with nature. Mass tourism burdens the environment and complicates the lives of the local and indigenous people on an international scale. Many tourist-heavy cities in the world such as Barcelona, Venice, and Amsterdam have implemented local ways to combat mass tourism. Often the initiative to fight tourism sprouts from the anger of the local populations. These cities are overcrowded with tourists behaving in disrespectful ways and while wandering the streets one might see graffiti announcing tourists to “go home”. With the growing rate of tourism and decreasingly shorter stays in the destinations, the Earth’s ability to sustain life is at its limit.

Definition of Key Terms

Mass tourism

The recreational movement of a large number of people to popular holiday destinations. E.g. popular beaches, amusement parks, and ski centers and especially national parks. Mass tourism stresses the environment due to the large concentration of tourists in specific locations.

Sustainable tourism²

Tourism that takes into consideration the socioeconomic situation of the destination as well as the environment by choosing an environment friendly means of travel or compensating the possible carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions. Sustainable tourism addresses the impact of traveling and the needs of the

¹ <https://www.dw.com/en/climate-change-how-harmful-is-tourism-for-the-environment/a-62597871>

² <https://www.unwto.org/sustainable-development>

local populations. Sustainable tourism includes respecting the local culture and wildlife and leaving the destination as it was before the visit.

Greenwashing³

A process of spreading misinformation and conveying false impressions on the consumer. This misinformation often lies about the level of eco-friendliness and sustainability of a company or a business. Many airlines tend to portray a sustainable image of their company and therefore claim to partake in sustainable tourism, when in reality the company does not meet the requirements of a sustainable business.

Explanation of the Question⁴

The effect of mass tourism on the environment includes overcrowding, pollution, rises of living costs, and the disrespectful behavior of tourists.⁵ The most popular tourist spots in the world such as Venice and New York are suffering from the overcrowding of the streets which creates a great deal of noise pollution as well as trash in the streets and water. For landlords, renting houses and apartments to tourists is more profitable which leaves long term renting locals without affordable options. Flying masses of people from across the world is a heavy burden on the environment as well. The effect of mass tourism on the environment is a global issue that all the tourist heavy areas and later on the whole world will face. Mass tourism needs to be reduced on a global scale. However, it is an issue that can be worked on even on a smaller level.

One of the most popular means of long distance and international travel is flying. Air travel is responsible for about 2.4% of the world's carbon emissions⁶. On the other hand the cruise industry⁷ is the fastest growing area of tourism and is complicit to about 2.9% of the world's carbon emissions. Travel by airplanes or cruise ships has therefore been regarded as detrimental to the environment. Carbon dioxide and methane emissions as well as other pollution cause the greenhouse effect which raises the sea levels and causes the Earth's natural balance to careen. More natural disasters, drought and the submerging of many parts of land is expected to happen in a constantly decreasing amount of time.

Living spaces of the local people and wildlife

³ <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/g/greenwashing.asp>

⁴ <https://sustainabletourism.net/>

⁵ <https://ecobnb.com/blog/2020/02/overtourism-causes-consequences-solutions/>

⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200218-climate-change-how-to-cut-your-carbon-emissions-when-flying>

⁷ <https://www.reuters.com/business/sustainable-business/cruise-industry-faces-choppy-seas-it-tries-clean-up-its-act-climate-2022-07-27/>

Many popular holiday destinations prioritize tourists over their own people and wildlife. These destinations invest in building for the tourists rather than their own citizens. City councils approve projects such as huge hotel complexes and amusement parks which take up a great amount of space. These projects often interfere with nature and the already existing homes of the locals. Many local people face evictions and rising costs of living. The wildlife and nature around the tourist destinations suffer from the growing lack of space as well as the pollution generated by tourists.

Cultural extinction

Foreign tourists flooding into another country can have severe consequences when it comes to the local culture. Even if the tourists are there to admire and appreciate the culture, mass tourism still has its negative effects. It is not uncommon for tourists to disrespect the local culture in one way or another. Defacing cultural structures, breaking cultural or religious items and cultural appropriation are some of the problems that come with the lack of respect many tourists have. The locals might also start to lose their grip and connection to their own culture. Many profit off of selling items and experiences and forget the real meaning of their culture. All of these things combined enhance the possibility of cultural extinction.

Observations about the Covid-19 pandemic

During the worst time of the Covid-19 pandemic travel was at its minimum. The lack of travel did not last that long and therefore the environmental impacts were not too visible. A lessening amount of air pollution was deduced in cities such as Los Angeles and Shanghai that suffer from poor air quality. Social media was also filled with videos and pictures of animals coming back to explore cities that were overcrowded with people beforehand. Most importantly the pandemic showed how environmental degradation increases the risks of pandemics that could be even more dangerous than the Covid-19 virus.⁸ Through the pandemic people showcased an immense amount of unity and potential when it comes to working together for a better world.

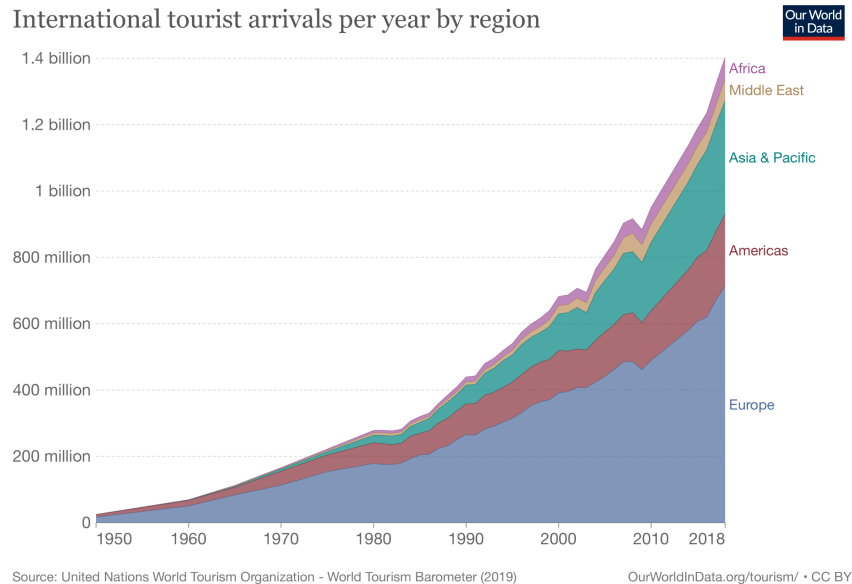
Environmental impact of mass tourism⁹

Tourism has been growing almost exponentially since the 1950s. It is estimated that 1.4 billion people arrive in their holiday destinations a year. The CO₂ emissions caused by plane travel and cruise ships puts immense pressure on the environment. Alongside with pollution, tourists contribute to overconsumption when buying souvenirs and other items on their holiday. Souvenirs from popular holiday destinations tend to symbolize something important to the region where the holiday is spent. For tropical destinations the souvenirs might be e.g. seashells and corals, which are taken from their own living environment. Earth's biodiversity suffers from the collection of these artifacts. Another problem that

⁸ <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/covid-19-lessons-for-sustainability>

⁹ <https://www.theworldcounts.com/challenges/consumption/transport-and-tourism/negative-environmental-impacts-of-tourism>

holiday destinations face is erosion. Roads, sidewalks and cliffs are experiencing erosion at an incredible speed due to the thousands of tourists that walk there daily. Animals are adapting to living alongside humans and becoming dependent on them. Commensal relationships between animals and humans are becoming more and more common. On an evolutionary level this might lead to consequences that harm the biodiversity of the planet. Tourists visiting national parks are also scaring away the animals that habit the parks with their disrespectful behavior.



International tourist arrivals per year between 1950-2018¹⁰

Key Member States and NGOs Involved and Their Views

United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)¹¹

The UNWTO is the United Nations agency responsible for the promotion of sustainable, environment friendly, accessible, and sustainable tourism and travel. The UNWTO strives to promote economic growth alongside the sustainable development of the tourism industry. Other goals of the UNWTO include improving tourism competitiveness and advancing tourism's contribution to poverty and development. The UNWTO was formed in 1975 due to the growing popularity of traveling in the times of economic growth in the industrialized countries.

¹⁰ <https://ourworldindata.org/tourism>

¹¹ <https://www.unwto.org/about-us>

Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)¹²

The GSTC was created by several UN agencies alongside Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to fight false claims about mass tourism such as greenwashing and to develop sustainable travel and tourism. The GSTC creates tools to create global standards for tourism and to verify legitimate claims of sustainable businesses. The GSTC offers help to the organizations that certify travel agencies, hotels, and such with certificates of sustainability.

Pacific countries

Even though Pacific countries do not experience heavy tourist flow, they are some of the most affected by the world's mass tourism. Countries such as Tuvalu and Nauru are tiny island nations that are submerging into the ocean due to the rising sea levels. These nations are trying to get their voices heard through political actions but due to their small size and lack of tourists, they are often regarded as irrelevant in the discussions about mass tourism.

Timeline of Events¹³

Date	Description of event
1975	UNWTO formed
March 2020	The World Health Organisation declares a global pandemic which reduced traveling on a great scale due to the stay at home orders
January 2021	75 or UN75: A Conversation on Rethinking Tourism
November 4, 2021	The Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism (COP26)

UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events¹⁴

The United Nations involvement mainly includes the establishment of the United Nations World Tourism Organization. The UN has also hosted multiple smaller events such as panel discussions but regarding this issue there is still work to be done.

- The Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism Support the global commitment to halve emissions by 2030 and reach net zero as soon as before 2050
- Promotion of ecotourism for poverty eradication and environment protection, 21 December 2016 **(A/RES/71/240)**¹⁵

¹² <https://www.gstcouncil.org/>

¹³ <https://webunwto.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2022-09/from-crisis-to-transformation-WTD2022.pdf?VersionId=E2562wREejLJYZbb5IkplKFufBA9URdC>

¹⁴ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/09/1128141>

¹⁵ <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N16/461/37/PDF/N1646137.pdf?OpenElement>

- Sustainable tourism and sustainable development in Central America, 19 December 2019 (A/RES/74/211)¹⁶
- The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals¹⁷ are all tied to the goals of making travel and tourism sustainable

Possible Solutions¹⁸

Mass tourism is a problem which requires concrete action and solutions¹⁹. Action has been taken around the world to combat this issue but most of it has been on a very local and individual level. Global traveling companies and organizations alongside with countries have been ignoring this issue on the basis of profit off tourism.

Sustainable tourism

Sustainable tourism has been proposed as the main solution for the effects caused by mass tourism. Instead of limiting tourist flow and therefore putting the local population's income at risk, sustainable tourism promotes a way of traveling which creates a minimal impact on the environment. Sustainable tourism takes into account the harm caused to the environment and the socioeconomic situation of the destination. Increasing the awareness of the harm caused by flying and traveling cruise ships is a way to promote sustainable tourism. At the same time, travel by train should be encouraged. Limiting mass tourism has also been proposed as a solution and a way to promote sustainability but this suggestion has faced a lot of backlash due to economic reasons.

Virtual tourism²⁰

Virtual tourism has been proposed as an alternative way to experience traveling. This form of travel gained popularity during the Covid-19 pandemic due to the absent ability to travel physically. Virtual tourism has many means of creating an experience. This could happen through the usage of virtual reality (VR) glasses that take the user to the destination on a virtual tour. A simpler way could be to watch videos that have been created for the sake of giving an experience. Virtual tourism makes traveling more accessible and affordable. It also tackles the issue of emissions. Virtual tourism has been heavily criticized due to the lack of actual experience and the possible loss of grip on reality. Virtual tourism also faces the accusation of being a dystopian concept. However, today many houses and

¹⁶ <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N19/434/85/PDF/N1943485.pdf?OpenElement>

¹⁷ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

¹⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KjNwR2C6Q8I>

¹⁹ <https://www.dw.com/en/how-amsterdam-is-fighting-mass-tourism/a-47806959>

²⁰ <https://tourismteacher.com/virtual-tourism/>

apartments are bought and rented only on the basis of seeing a virtual tour of the property. Therefore, using virtual reality has been proven to be an effective way to experience a space or destination.

Longer stays and surveillance²¹

Venice is a world famous destination that has been facing all of the issues that come with mass tourism. Venice has increased surveillance around the city with about 500 cameras that are there to keep the tourists in line. The city has also implemented a fee, which all tourists have to pay to be allowed to stroll around the city. Venice's goal is to discourage one-day tourism and to limit the amount of people that come into the city everyday. When travelers stay longer in their destinations, the amount of daily arrivals and departures decreases. With surveillance many cities and countries wish to face less disruption and destruction caused by tourists.

Spreading a message of sustainability to tourists and global education²²

It is important to state that individuals also contribute to what level of harm mass tourism costs. Individual acts can help to reduce the harmful impact of mass tourism. Buying local, doing research about your destination before arriving, and behaving in an overall respectful manner are crucial steps to traveling more sustainably. Establishing clear rules and spreading awareness about sustainable travel are great ways travel agencies and airlines can contribute positively to the issue. Countries need to do their part as well in the form of education. Teaching about the harms of tourism in school and showcasing the problems in the media are possible ways to educate regular travelers as well as officials about the impacts of mass tourism.

Bibliography

1. <https://www.dw.com/en/climate-change-how-harmful-is-tourism-for-the-environment/a-62597871> accessed 24.11.2022
2. <https://www.unwto.org/sustainable-development> accessed 22.11.2022
3. <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/g/greenwashing.asp> accessed 9.12.2022
4. <https://sustainabletourism.net/> accessed 3.12.2022
5. <https://ecobnb.com/blog/2020/02/overtourism-causes-consequences-solutions/> accessed 30.11.2022
6. <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200218-climate-change-how-to-cut-your-carbon-emissions-when-flying> accessed 12.12.2022
7. <https://www.reuters.com/business/sustainable-business/cruise-industry-faces-choppy-seas-it-tries-clean-up-its-act-climate-2022-07-27/> accessed 12.12.2022

²¹ <https://traveltomorrow.com/italy-attempts-to-preserve-venice-by-limiting-the-number-of-tourists/>

²² <https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.theinvisibletourist.com/travel-avoid-contributing-to-overtourism-solutions/&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1670755709027818&usg=AOvVaw3gUAhfq4QwMkWxWnKpq1YM>

8. <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/covid-19-lessons-for-sustainability> accessed 12.12.2022
9. <https://www.theworldcounts.com/challenges/consumption/transport-and-tourism/negative-environmental-impacts-of-tourism> accessed 3.12.2022
10. <https://ourworldindata.org/tourism> accessed 12.12.2022
11. <https://www.unwto.org/about-us> accessed 30.11.2022
12. <https://www.gstcouncil.org/> accessed 9.12.2022
13. <https://webunwto.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2022-09/from-crisis-to-transformation-WTD2022.pdf?VersionId=E2562wREejLJYZbb5IkplKFufBA9URdC> accessed 1.12.2022
14. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/09/1128141> accessed 1.12.2022
15. <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N16/461/37/PDF/N1646137.pdf?OpenElement> accessed 12.12.2022
16. <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N19/434/85/PDF/N1943485.pdf?OpenElement> accessed 12.12.2022
17. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/> accessed 12.12.2022
18. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KjNwR2C6Q8I> accessed 30.11.2022
19. <https://www.dw.com/en/how-amsterdam-is-fighting-mass-tourism/a-47806959> accessed 30.11.2022
20. <https://tourismteacher.com/virtual-tourism/> accessed 3.12.2022
21. <https://traveltomorrow.com/italy-attempts-to-preserve-venice-by-limiting-the-number-of-tourists/> accessed 9.12.2022
22. <https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.theinvisibletourist.com/travel-avoid-contributing-to-overtourism-solutions/&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1670755709027818&usq=AOvVaw3gUAhfq4QwMkwxWnKpq1YM> accessed 3.12.2022