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# Transforming the (tourism) world for good and (re)generating the potential ‘new normal’

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## ABSTRACT

With or without the global COVID-19 pandemic to promote and envision a meaningful and positive transformation of the planet in general, and tourism specifically, a wake-up call is long overdue. The 300-years old industrial and modern paradigm of ruthless and selfish exploitation of natural resources has separated us from nature and ultimately ourselves to such an extent that the crises of our economic, political, environmental, social and health-care systems do not come at any surprise. Yet, in juxtaposition to (post)modern pessimistic views, the positive transmodern paradigm shift with its holistic perspectives and practices can be observed. Led by ‘the silent revolution’ of cultural creatives, new worlds are emerging, although still kept at the margins. ‘Transformative travel and tourism’ as an ever-growing trend, appears to be an important medium through which these cultural creatives reinvent themselves and the world they live in. Inner transformation is reflected in the outer world. New ways of being, knowing and doing in the world are emerging as conscious citizens, consumers, producers, travellers, entrepreneurs, and community leaders are calling and acting upon the necessary transformation towards the *regenerative* paradigm and *regenerative economic systems*. Based on the natural cycles of renewal and regeneration, this circular approach is underpinned by regenerative land practices. The vision of connecting regenerative agriculture and transformative tourism is offered to reset the global tourism system for good.

## 摘要

无论是否出现新型冠状病毒肺炎全球大流行，警钟早就应该敲响以促进和展望整个地球，尤其是旅游业发生重大和积极的转变。历时300年野蛮而又自私地开采自然资源的工业和现代范式，将我们与自然分开，以至于当我们的经济、政治、环境、社会和保健系统的危机到来时，我们一点也不惊讶。然而，与（后）现代悲观主义观点同时存在的是我们也可以观察到跨现代范式及其整体视角和实践的积极转变。在文化创意“无声革命”的引领下，仍处于边缘的新世界正在崛起。“改造式旅游和旅游业”作为一种不断发展的趋势，似乎是这些文化创意者重塑自己以及他们生处世界的重要媒介。外在世界反映了内在的转变。伴随着有上述意识的公民、消费者、生产者、旅行者、企业家和社区领导人呼吁并采取行动实现向可再生范式和再生经济体系的必要转变，新的存在、认识和行动方式正在出现。基于可恢复和再生的自然循环，这种循环

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## 关键词

跨现代范式转变；无声革命；文化创意者；改造式旅游和旅游业；新型冠状病毒肺炎；再生经济；再生农业

方法以再生土地实践为基础, 提出将再生农业和改造式旅游相结合的愿景, 以期永久性地重置全球旅游体系。

## Introduction

We will not go back to normal. Normal never was. Our pre-corona existence was not normal other than we normalised greed, inequity, exhaustion, depletion, extraction, disconnection, confusion, rage, hoarding, hate and lack. We should not long to return, my friends. We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment. One that fits all of humanity and nature (Renee Taylor, 2020).

This special TG issue has been designed to promote ‘**a substantial, meaningful, and positive transformation of the planet in general, and tourism specifically.**’ A call to not return to a “normal” that existed before COVID-19 but rather to provide a vision of how the world can or is evolving into something different. I have been ‘obsessed’ with these kinds of issues most of my life and academic career. From my personal traumatic experience of the civil war in Croatia to my PhD in critical economic geography in New Zealand, to co-founding the global Critical Tourism Studies movement and promotion of an Academy of hope, I’ve called upon new ways of being, knowing and doing not only in tourism studies and practice but also in the world (e.g. Ateljevic, 2009, 2011). Thus, I feel I cannot say anything new here, but will aim to instead mainstream previously marginalised ideas allowed by the unprecedented global standstill. To potentially move what was considered either radical, over positive or naïve into the centre of (y)our attention and (y)our consideration. During this great pause, we could potentially embrace the holistic paradigms and practices that have been waiting on the margins. In our humbled state, we could bring them into the centre and build a new system around them (Eisenstein, 2020). In some parts of the world, we already are. I thank Alan Lew on this initiative to wave the flag of what **radically** different and potentially positive outcomes can come out of this huge predicament. We need to see a vision of what’s desirable and possible so that we are able to commit to a paradigm shift.

I imagine all sectors surrounding or embedded in tourism practice will be in a desperate need for a new and meaningful sense of direction. In such desperate need and ambitious aspiration, I recall Charles Eisenstein (n.d.) when he states: ‘We don’t need smarter solutions. We need different questions’. Indeed, we need to look at the values underlying, pre-existing and exacerbating the crisis that may drive us to ask questions like, what do we really want? What does a beautiful life look like? What do we want to leave behind and what do we want to take forward? If we are able to stop almost everything to save sick humans, why don’t we do the same for a sick planet? That’s the invitation that crises in general can offer - that is to deeply reflect on our dominant worldview and our value system. Anderson and Ackerman-Anderson (2010), in their extensive experience with change management at the organisational and systemic levels, distinguish processes of *change* and *transformation* whereby the *change* happens within the existing world view, while *transformation* in fact ‘is the emergence of a new order out of existing chaos... <which> begins with ever-increasing

disruption to the system, moves to the point of death of the old way of being, and then, as with the phoenix, proceeds toward an inspired rebirth' (p. 61).

## Transformative travel and tourism

In 2009, I wrote a chapter for Tribe's book on *Philosophical Issues of Tourism*, entitled: *Transmodernity: Remaking Our (Tourism) World?*, in which I summarised my academic journey from being a pessimistic, critical theorist to a more positive and hopeful academic. In juxtaposition to the structural relations of injustice created by the worldview of 'the survival of the fittest', I reviewed the emerging promising discourses of the transmodern philosophical, economic, political and socio-cultural shift. The shift that moves us from the story of separation from ourselves, nature and each other - to a narrative of *inter-being*, the one that sees the mutual interdependence of all living forms (Eisenstein, 2013). Ghisi (2008) described transmodernity as a planetary vision in which humans are beginning to realize that we are all (including plants and animals) connected into one system, which makes us symbiotic, vulnerable and responsible for the Earth as an indivisible living community. The current pandemic crisis could not be a greater case in point.

Magda (1989), the Spanish philosopher who first coined the term, uses Hegelian logic whereby modernity, postmodernity and transmodernity form a dialectic triad that completes a process of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. As expressed in her own words: 'the third tends to preserve the defining impetus of the first yet is devoid of its underlying base: by integrating its negation the third moment reaches a type of specular closure' (p. 13). In other words, transmodernism is critical of modernism and postmodernism while at the same time drawing elements from each. In a way it is a return to some form of absolute 'logic' that goes beyond Western ideology and aims to connect the human race to a new shared story, which can be called a *global relational consciousness* (Rifkin, 2005; for the full review of transmodernity paradigm see Ateljevic, 2013).

The paradigm shift is being carried by the growing population of so-called transmodern 'cultural creatives' who are acquiring new ways of looking at and being in the world — ways that are consistent with a sustainable global future and in doing so forming and shaping new cultures of conscious living (Ray & Anderson, 2001). They provide and demand products and services based on their values of social and environmental justice, and travel appears to be a powerful medium through which these conscious citizens seek to re-invent themselves and the world they live in. They travel in order to volunteer and make a difference; they value what is slow, small and local (especially food); they are connected and communicative; and they seek meaningful experiences, which help them develop personally and collectively (Ateljevic et al., 2016).

Observing and researching new travel trends, I argued they are indicators manifesting the emerging global shift in human consciousness rather than just 'special interest' market segments. Elsewhere, I have further reformulated this transmodern perspective into the concept of *hopeful tourism scholarship* (Pritchard et al., 2011). This values-led, humanist perspective that strives for the transformation of our way of seeing, being, doing and relating in tourism worlds, called for the creation of a less unequal, more sustainable planet through action-oriented and participant-driven learnings and acts.

Since then, a growing number of studies have begun to emerge to reaffirm ‘transformative travel and tourism’ as a potential means of making the world a better place. Claimed to create conditions conducive to personal and social transformation necessary for a radical change in worldview, transformative tourism has become a new buzzword in tourism studies (Reisinger, 2013; 2015; Lean et al., 2014; Lean, 2016; UNWTO and Institute for Tourism, 2016; Kirillova et al., 2017a; 2017b; Soulard et al., 2019). In a similar vein, Pollock (2015) uses the term ‘conscious travel’ which assists this transformation towards a life-affirming, place-based *regenerative* economy in which all stakeholders and all living forms can thrive and flourish.

Parallely, the tourism sector has reflected this trend. For example, the Transformative Travel Council (TTC) was formed in 2016, which comprised of ‘guides and conveners of a global movement which maximizes the power of travel to positively transform how we live our lives, how we live with others, and how we live on our planet’ (TTC, n.d.). A trendy Vogue magazine article (Trimble, 2017) claimed that ‘transformational travel is the next evolution. It has similar elements of experiential travel, but taken a step further—it’s travel motivated and defined by a shift in perspective, self-reflection and development, and a deeper communion with nature and culture’. In 2018 Skift (the agency that invented the term *overtourism*) published a report ‘Transformative travel: Shifting toward meaning, purpose and self-fulfilment’, claiming that ‘travelers today are increasingly drawn to travel as a form of self-actualization and personal transformation and growth. They want more than a simple visit to a new destination or spend their days merely relaxing on a beach. Instead, the travel they’re seeking is an experience of the world that goes deep — one that changes them in ways they may not even be aware of’ (p.3). To this end, Sheldon (2020) examines how the ultimate human journey is an inner one towards the state that gives us a sense of peace and unity and connectedness with all living beings, and how tourism destinations and providers might design tourism experiences to assist tourists on the path to this ultimate inner destination.

During the same years, I conducted a longitudinal (2015–2019) research project titled: ‘*Trans-tourism: an integrated approach for the study of the transformative role of tourism in the 21st century*\*’. Designed to run for the period of 4 years through a multi-method approach, the project further investigated these claims of tourism being a transformative catalyst towards a more caring and sustainable human existence on our beautiful planet. This proposition was analysed from three aspects, by capturing: a) the transformative power of past and present travel experiences of the cultural creatives, b) the motivations and practises of pioneering change-makers who create transformational travel products, and c) tourism stakeholders’ receptiveness to integrate a transformational view of tourism into the organisational design of their businesses and products. The project was underpinned by my immersion into a whole variety of transformative travel programmes and experiences and the subsequent maintenance of connections with the participants (mostly through closed social media groups). Moreover, I have also become a social entrepreneur who established her own transformative tourism enterprise (see my Instagram handle: @terrameeracroatia). While it goes beyond the scope of this short paper to elaborate on all findings (for more, see e.g. Ateljevic & Tomljenovic, 2017; Tomljenovic & Ateljevic, 2017), some generative conclusions will be highlighted here.

All co-creative informants expressed a desire to live more fully and authentically with a meaningful life purpose and in the greater harmony with nature and humanity. Most of them at some point in their lives, felt 'stuck' in a system in which they no longer believe; by running the 'rat race' of climbing a career ladder and working exclusively for money. Their internal shift happened either when they experienced a huge personal life change or through 'unusual' travel experiences that touched upon this suppressed sentiment and helped them to reflect and make the necessary changes in their lives. Once they reached 'the point of no return' as Ross (2010) explains from his therapeutic view, the inevitable question posed itself: 'how do I live now when I do not believe in such a system anymore?' As a consequence of this urge, many leave their established careers behind and become social entrepreneurs, community leaders, activists, volunteers and often establish their own transformative tourism enterprises (that either combined their hands-on skills, hobbies or moving to a rural setting). These entrepreneurial initiatives then serve as venues to manifest their commitment to change their lifestyle and live more close to their own truth, while at the same time providing a fairly sustainable livelihood (albeit living more simply than in their previous overtly urban and consumerist lifestyle). The key motivation that was solidly expressed by all informants can be surmised as: 'I need to live what I believe in', however challenging that may be as the dominant system continues pushing the old paradigm of separation, consumerism, competition, and status achievement. As expressed by one of the informants in one of closed Facebook groups:

We are curious how the fire, that has ignited something precious and something potent in many people since The Journey at Embercombe, can be rekindled. A fire will go out if not kept an eye on and given space, air and fuel - and a spark!

We intend to create a space for reconnection with ourselves, each other and given airtime to be heard, whatever the inner voices may be thinking, it's a place that intends to move past any limiting fears by listening and learning from each other. Moving above and beyond our expectations and allowing transformation to be brought about, however small and simple, big and complex.

### **From transformative to regenerative: Invitation for 'the new normal'**

If you've never heard about the amazing potential of regenerative agriculture and land use practices to naturally sequester a critical mass of CO<sub>2</sub> in the soil and forests, you're not alone. One of the best-kept secrets in the world today is that the solution to global warming and the climate crisis (as well as poverty and deteriorating public health) lies right under our feet, and at the end of our knives and forks (Ronnie Cummins, Regeneration International Steering Committee Member).

The cutting-edge research of medical Dr Zach Bush's \*\* team (n.d.; Bush, 2018; 2019) has shown that human health is dependent on the connections between cells and on the cooperation and communication with microorganisms such as bacteria, fungi, and viruses. This community of vital microorganisms or the *microbiome* living inside of us largely determines the state of our health and is directly strengthened by our interaction with the earth, and more specifically the soil in which we grow our food. Yet, we have disconnected ourselves from nature and our food supply, and that outsourcing has resulted in toxic farming practices and chemicals contaminating our food and killing the microbiome on which we are dependent for our bodies' healthy

functioning. Consequentially, the impact on human health has been disastrous. In the USA, where chemical, industrial farming now dominates over 80% of agricultural land, Dr Bush (2018; 2019) cites parallel medical studies that provide disturbing health statistics. In 1965, 4% of the total US population had a chronic disease, while as of 2015, 46% of American children have a chronic disease diagnosis. The horrific statistics continue where 1 in 4 Americans live with diabetes; 1 in 3 are obese; 1 in 2 live with major depression; 1 in 2 men and 1 in 3 women suffer from cancer; and lastly 1 in 3 men and 1 in 4 women are infertile. Dr Bush (n.d., 2019) points out how this array of conditions is on near identical trajectories of increase since 1996, corresponding to the release of the toxic herbicide glyphosate (the active ingredient in 'Roundup'). This water soluble weed killer has not only been pushed for farming in the US and all over the world, but has also been adopted by vast amount of American households in order to rid lawns and gardens of weeds, consequentially poisoning groundwater.

Similarly, Dr Aviva Romm, MD (2017) in her book on the adrenal thyroid revolution connects autoimmune diseases with the unregulated release of numerous toxins and chemicals into our environment. Not only through chemical farming but also around all aspects of industrial production that is creating a vicious cycle of disastrous impacts on our health, our ecosystems and all other living beings. This is a mirror of our current linear economic paradigm of ruthless and selfish exploitation of natural resources that has caused separation between and within ourselves, thus resulting in the crises of our economic, political, environmental, social and healthcare systems.

It is of no surprise that the regenerative paradigm and the regenerative economy have emerged as welcome alternatives with '*holistic worldview*, which recognizes that the proper functioning of complex wholes (like an economy) cannot be understood without understanding the ongoing, dynamic relationships among parts that give rise to greater "wholes"'(Fullerton, 2015, 13). More precisely, David Korten (2013), former professor at the Harvard Business School and prominent critic of corporate globalization, gives us an eloquent and simple definition: 'The only valid purpose of an economy is to serve life. To align the human economy with this purpose, we must learn to live as nature lives, organise as nature organizes, and learn as nature learns guided by a reality-based, life-centred, intellectually-sound economics'.

One of the first economic sectors that has been using this approach is regenerative agriculture and soil science (Shiva et al., 2015). This 'no spray, no toil' agriculture not only 'does no harm' to the land but actually improves it, using technologies that regenerate and revitalize the soil and the environment. In doing so, it leads to healthy soil, capable of producing high-quality, nutrient-dense food while simultaneously regenerating land, and ultimately leading to productive farms and healthy communities and economies (Regeneration International, n.d). Following this circular approach of soil economy, based on natural cycles of renewal and regeneration Shiva et al. (2015) use the analogy of the relationship between soil and society as a relationship based on reciprocity, on the '*Law of Return*'. The ecological law of return maintains the cycles of nutrients and water, which becomes the basis of real sustainability. In social terms, the law of return ensures mutuality, respect, human solidarity, equality, democracy and peace.

Fortunately, this story does not stop at theory as thousands of new, local, community-based initiatives, as well as cooperatives, social enterprises and neighbourhood

associations are mushrooming around the world. A good example is the European Network of Community-led Initiatives on Climate Change and Sustainability (Ecolise) whose members include international networks of community-based initiatives such as the Transition Town Network (representing over 1200 transition initiatives world-wide), the Global Ecovillage Network (15,000 ecovillages), the Permaculture movement (3 million practitioners globally), ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability (a global network of more than 1,750 local and regional governments (in 100+ countries) committed to sustainable urban development; national and regional networks; and other specialist bodies engaged in European-level research, training and communications to support community-led action on climate change and sustainability (Ecolise n.d.).

Departing from the grounds of such inspiration and to finally answer the question of what could be a positive and meaningful way forward for the future of tourism? I propose the correlation to regenerative agriculture practices for two key reasons. Firstly, it gives us a framework of regeneration rather than just sustaining the existing worldview. Secondly, food is one of the key ingredients underpinning tourism consumption. Can you imagine if all flights, hotels, restaurants, resorts... would use local organic produce coming from regenerative farms? If the total contribution of travel and tourism to global GDP in 2018 was US\$8.9 trillion (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2019) and 1.5 billion people travelled internationally in 2019 (UNWTO, 2020) - the positive global impact of the industry on the regeneration of the world would be huge. Satish Kumar, a founding editor of Resurgence Magazine and a key leader behind Schumacher college (Devon, the UK) beautifully reinforces my point here. In his recent interview (2020, April 16) on what will need to change in the post-COVID-19 world, he points explicitly to the notion of mass tourism and industrial agriculture as two key examples of unsustainable human activity disconnected from nature (he gave his interview one day after I wrote the final draft of this paper). Kumar then calls upon the need to return to the original meaning of travel as a journey of purpose, meaning, adventure and exploration, and growing small-scale food as the nurturing bedrock for human health rather than a commercial commodity.

What a beautiful new sense of purpose for each of us, as we stand at this crossroads to choose between the path toward greater isolation and separation or *the more beautiful world our hearts know it is possible* (Eiseinstein, 2013). As Eiseinsten (2020) brilliantly expressed in his article on what he described our collective coronation: 'We can normalize heightened levels of separation and control, believe that they are necessary to keep us safe, and accept a world in which we are afraid to be near each other. Or we can take advantage of this pause, this break in normal, to turn onto a path of reunion, of holism, of the restoring of lost connections, of the repair of community and the rejoining of the web of life'.

## Notes

\*The Croatian Science Foundation had awarded funding to a research team of the Institute for Tourism in Zagreb.

\*\* Dr Zach Bush, MD is a triple board certified physician specialised in internal medicine, endocrinology and hospice care and an internationally renowned educator on the microbiome as it relates to health, disease and our food production systems.



## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Notes on contributor

**Irena Ateljevic** obtained her PhD in Human Geography in 1998 at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. She worked at Auckland University, Victoria University of Wellington and Auckland University of Technology and did numerous international research projects in Asia and South Pacific. In 2005, she moved to the Netherlands to teach at Wageningen University, a highly esteemed university for sustainability and nature conservation issues. She is a co-founder of Critical Tourism Studies network dedicated to promote the academy of hope concept. Currently, she holds a part-time position of a senior scientific associate at the Institute for Tourism, Zagreb while also acting as an activist and social entrepreneur.

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