

# Chapter 40

## Sustainable Tourism Development in Times of the COVID–19 Pandemic: Case Study of Slovakia

**Hana Bielíková**

*Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia*

**Zuzana Palenčíková**

*Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia*

### **ABSTRACT**

*The COVID-19 acute respiratory syndrome pandemic completely stopped global tourism. Many countries have responded quickly to the situation with a package of measures to help minimize the negative effects of the pandemic on tourism. These impacts are negatively perceived by local population of examined areas which may lead to either uncontrollable tourism development or to dislike of locals in tourism development. Sustainable rural development index for years of 2019 and 2020 was calculated in order to define whether tourism development is under the limits of sustainability. To help to understand the development of tourism and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, a SWOT analysis was conducted.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Major crises that occurred in the tourism industry revealed dynamics and spark moments of reflection and movements for change. The acute respiratory syndrome pandemic known as COVID-19 has caused tourism to undergo many changes. The much-praised tourism growth trajectories of last years have been changed to fragile and unstable as tourist hordes disappeared from popular tourist attractions. The impact of COVID-19 on tourism generally has been a great catalyst to shift those forms of tourism that offer tourists more space and does not require much contact with others. That caused a shift of tourists

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interests to areas that had not to undergo an onslaught of tourists before the pandemic. That should also draw attention to communities at tourist destinations to their well-being.

This chapter is an expanded and enriched insight on ongoing research made in Slovakia. The research has been focused on marginal areas in Slovakia, characterized by specific historical landscape structures known as a dispersed settlement. These areas have fought before the COVID-19 pandemic with a lack of tourists despite undeniable genius loci, attractiveness, and all necessary assumptions towards the development of sustainable forms of tourism. However, with the onset of the COVID pandemic, the area has fought with other extremes. To prevent acute respiratory syndrome from spreading Slovak government has reduced the mobility of Slovaks by restrictions such as the ban of travel from one to another district ([korona.gov.sk](https://www.korona.gov.sk), 2021). It caused the concentrations of tourists in rural areas on one hand, and migration of inhabitants to their secondary livings in rural areas on the other hand.

The theory of complex adaptive systems by Boschma (2015) considers tourism to be open and adaptive, tourism is continually exposed to rather autonomous pressures which originate from its dynamic environment. COVID-19 could be considered as one of these pressures. Tourism copes and adapts to this pressure through the adaptation processes. That could lead to the transformation of forms and tourism products. The transformation is crucial as pandemic led to unforeseen demand change. Not just coronavirus pandemic but many other crises such as economic recession, environmental degradation and political instability influenced tourism demand (Cro & Martins, 2017). Although some of the crises required short-term tourism recovery to continue in serving to tourists, this is presumably not the case of pandemic that would need some long-term survival approaches (Novelli, et.al, 2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought significant socioeconomic changes in many dimensions of people lives as Romagosa (2020) indicated year ago: changes in mobility, socialisation and consumption patterns, our leisure and work. Emerged demand changes under the influence of the COVID -19 pandemic in the examined area caused an increase in secondary living that has also led to the significant environmental burden without no compensation increase in municipality financial gain. Furthermore, the duration of the pandemic followed by vast socioeconomic crises is hardly predictable. Also, it is not yet known how long mobility restrictions and social distancing must be maintained to prevent the COVID-19 and its mutations from spreading, despite ongoing vaccination of the population. Therefore, it is more than desirable to set boundaries for sustainable tourism development in areas that are very sensitive to any changes and at the same time to ensure the development of tourism to maintain socio-economic development of the area.

On the other hand, Higgins and Desbiolles (2021) say this pandemic crisis can be seen as an unexpected opportunity to think about the actual unsustainability of the pre-crisis development of the tourism industry. In this sense, according to Higgings and Desbilles (2021), the current challenge of tourism is to limit tourism growth in the interests of social and ecological integrity and reveal how everyone can benefit from tourism. This should be done with the bolstering of proximity tourism in mind (Navarro Jurado et al.,2020 in Romagosa, 2020) that could be understood as travelling close to one's place of residence as closer destinations could be considered less dangerous in terms of spreading the virus. In the context of the pandemic situation, the role of tourism in rural development is more relevant than ever before. Tourism in rural areas offers many opportunities for recovery as tourists are looking for less populated areas with an offer of outdoor activities. At the same time, subjects of rural tourism are less prepared to overcome the direct and indirect impacts of the pandemic. Therefore, it is extremely important to plan support and development in a way that will face the economic and social effects of

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