R7 Touristification: their holidays, our misery.

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Motion text

The current economic system puts profit before people, everything and anything on this earth can be commercialised beyond its limits, from labour to natural resources, with gain and economic growth as a pretext. Our cities and communities are being transformed due to aggressive and unsustainable tourism. Our home towns and cities are crowded, the public transportation is often designed to accommodate the demands of seasonal visitors instead of the needs of the local community and traditional local long-life businesses are being replaced by 24h supermarkets or souvenirs shops. These are some of the consequences of touristification, a process by which a place changes as it becomes an object of tourist consumption. This process affects both rural and urban areas with the same principle and carrying very similar repercussions: the locals are expelled from their neighbourhoods as the tourism industry damages the labour market and the environment. Touristification affects particularly the mediterranean countries, where low-cost flights and the rise of peer-to-peer online platforms are thriving on the lack of courage of decision-makers, but the main European cities and some rural areas are no strangers to this phenomenon.

Touristification turns local cultures to commodities, driving a loss of traditional livelihoods, and creating tourism enclaves within our cities which are completely disconnected from local communities. The economy of many Southern European cities relies on mass tourism, a sector which is characterized by having precarious jobs with low wages and suffering from seasonality. Overmore, it has a negative effect on the housing sector, increasing the prices of rent for the neighours of the city, who are generally poorer than most of the tourists. People who work in the touristic sector, many of them young, report cramped living conditions and barely earning a living wage.

Touristification also has a negative impact on the environment, increasing the levels of pollution and damaging local ecosystems. Mass tourism generates a huge amount of waste and water and energy consumption over the replacement rate, which is critical in the planetary crises we are facing. Ecosystems in the South of Europe are one of the most vulnerable to climate change. Besides that, the lack of control of the number of seasonal visitors puts at risk both the locals and the tourists in case of an eventual emergency, whether natural or

industrial, as the evacuation and emergency plans are often not designed taking into account the enormous amount of tourists in the area.

Touristification is shaping the urban landscape, where tourists and their needs are prioritized above local people's necessities. For instance, public space and public transport networks are saturated with tourists. Moreover, gentrification is another consequence of the touristification, since long-term residents and businesses are displaced due to the increasing property value led by implementation of touristic accommodations (hotels, apartments, Airbnbs…). In fact, the social, economic and environmental changes caused by this model of tourism have also had a negative effect on our health. Touristification intersects with other social injustices, such as racism, sexism, and ableism, and certain groups may be excluded from tourism opportunities or may face discrimination in tourism settings.

A special reference needs to be made to the rupture of social bonds provoked by the touristically-induced gentrification. In the case of the short-term rentals, as a result of the high popularity of such digital platforms, the traditional neighborly relations have been disrupted. The constant replacement of renters, who do not give the impression of becoming integrated in the local culture, provoke the suspicion of the rest of the inhabitants and even fear by the elderly as the latter ones feel they lack stability. Therefore, many values of the once-established notion of the «community» have been lost

Mass tourism practices such as the all-inclusive packages also have strong negative impacts in local economies and societies. This type of vacation - offered by big companies such as Thomas Cook or Tuir- includes all of the expenses associated with a holiday, from the flight to accommodation, meals and activities. However, they do not benefit local economies. The type of work that this model of business creates, often for young people, women and migrants, is an archetype of precariousness. One of the groups affected the most by this model is the hotel housekeepers. During the past years, these workers, who are mostly women from migrant and working backgrounds, reported that they are forced to work at an inhumane pace. They are overworked with horrible consequences for their health: muscular pain due to the repetition of movements, irritation of the respiratory tracts due to the exposure to chemical products, and neurological and mental health problems caused by the stress and anxiety as they worry they can be fired in case they are not able to deliver.

Overall, touristification and mass tourism are potential generators of social inequalities, and imply growth models that promote social injustice through the exploitation of people and nature. Decision-makers have the power to take control of this situation by tackling the main consequences in the market like the rising price of housing, by limiting the number of visitors and pushing for a change of model, and also by ensuring that the workers of this sector are treated in line with labour rights and human dignity.

For all that, the Federation of Young European Greens calls on:

● Local, regional and national governments to design and implement policies that promote a different model of tourism, based on sustainability and the well-being of the local communities, while mitigating the negative impacts of touristification that we are already experiencing.

● Local governments to cap on licenses for tourist apartments, hotels and resorts in tensioned areas, due to ecological and social reasons, and include tourist taxations and limiting the number of tourists to mitigate the effects of this sector.

● To apply strict labour controls in the tourism sector to avoid job insecurity, which is not allowing youth to live decent lives.

● The European Union to enforce legally binding environmental protection from tourism, and include the destruction of our natural areas (forests, coastal areas, water bodies) due to tourism in the list of environmental crimes.

● To make sure affordable housing options are available for people in touristified areas, implementing rent control and implementing inclusionary zoning method, that is to determine which neighborhoods are compatible with short-term rentals for tourists so as to limit the consequences of this phenomenon’s overspreading and gentrification.

● The European Union and state members’ to stop subsidizing massive tourism activities and fossil-fuel activities and prioritizing alternative modes of travel, like cycling or public transportation.

● To promote other less-known sustainable areas which have the capacity to withstand the impact of tourism and thus to redirect the crowds of visitors whose stereotypic holiday choices contribute to the degradation of classic destinations.

● To promote the diversification of Southern economies, to make them more resilient to planetary crisis, such as the climate emergency or the war in Ukraine.