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**VOL. 8. N° 15**  
**AN INTRODUCTION TO «THE COVID-19**  
**PANDEMIC AND ITS IMPACT ON TOURISM IN URBAN SPACES»**

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As well as its serious health effects, the COVID-19 pandemic is also having a profound social and economic impact, and the current crisis is forecast to be especially punishing, with rising levels of poverty and escalating inequality (Méndez, 2021). The tourism sector has been particularly hard hit due to restricted movement and human interaction (Gössling et al., 2021), in contrast to the situation during the global financial crisis of 2008, in which the sector played an outstanding role in the subsequent economic recovery and in job creation (Murray and Cañada, 2021). Indeed, tourism was one of the bases for reactivating the cycle of accumulation and reproduction of capital (Cañada and Murray, 2019), becoming one of the main sources of income in many cities (Jover and Díaz-Parra, 2020). The months-long suspension of most tourism, and its slow, uncertain recovery, particularly at an international level, which is also dependent on the evolution of the pandemic and vaccination programmes in other parts of the world, augur serious difficulties for economies that rely heavily on tourism. This situation has highlighted the vulnerability of regions, and particularly urban spaces, that have undergone an intense process of touristification in recent years, which in turn has become the source of discontent and social conflict (Colomb and Novy, 2017; Milano et al., 2019).

This context of crisis, with its severe implications for many people's lives, has opened up the debate on how to intervene in this situation, polarised between those demanding urgent public funding to reactivate the tourism economy, others arguing for a reappraisal of its current modus operandi, and yet another group advocating degrowth measures and processes of socio-ecological transition (Fletcher et al., 2019). Because not all contexts are the same in this debate, more detailed and complex analyses are needed to take into account the nuanced and diverse characteristics of each situation. In addition, the interruption of international tourism and the uncertain, insecure recovery of the sector have sparked interest in domestic tourism, particularly the different forms of local tourism (Navarro et al., 2020), which in contrast to its traditionally more modest role in public policies, could go some way to reviving the sector (Díaz and Lurdés, 2013; Romagosa, 2020).

This special edition of *Kult-ur* rose out of concern about how these disruptive dynamics caused by the COVID-19 pandemic –and the resulting transformations in the workings of the tourism industry– can impact urban spaces, which over the last decade have become environments where touristification is prioritised, and whose effects, including over-tourism, have been extensively analysed (Koens et al., 2018). Changes are inevitably still incipient and far from consolidated because the factors driving them are ongoing. The growth in tourism has had considerable repercussions on city centres, whether sociodemographic (residents replaced by visitors in rental accommodation, forced displacement, demographic decline, conflicts with the local population, etc.), spatial (incompatible uses of public spaces), economic (higher inflation, increasing property and rental prices, replacement and disappearance of traditional shops and businesses, etc.) or cultural (Calle Vaquero, 2019). At the same time, the numbers of new agents developing tourism projects are growing, inequalities are rising, as are the environmental problems associated with spatial justice, and the public investment policies aimed at rehabilitating and restructuring city centres taken over by tourism.

Despite the difficulties, the efforts to describe, diagnose and forecast possible trends draw our attention to substantial transformations that demand systematic research. In this edition we hope to highlight some of these processes. The contributions focus their analyses on Spain and Latin America. They identify the profound impact the crisis in international tourism is having on urban spaces, although at the same time underlying trends to recover the pre-crisis dynamic are persisting, despite the obstacles to change posed by the pre-existing situation. However, certain factors are



identified that would potentially favour the development of tourism associated with local markets, and the recovery of spaces whose inhabitants have been displaced to make way for residential accommodation or leisure facilities.

This edition opens with M. Haro Aragù and J. García Mestanza's systematic review of the literature on transformations occurring in tourist cities before the COVID-19 pandemic and the ways their main problems can be solved. They link the categories COVID-19, urban tourism, overtourism and local tourism with the concept of sustainable tourism to make a selection from the main articles published to date. In addition to summarising the state of the art, the review identifies the absence of connections between all these concepts in the literature analysed. The article thus helps lay the foundations for a research agenda that will provide a more complex and integrated analysis of the urban transformations arising from the new COVID-19 context in places that rely heavily on tourism, and taking into account the possibilities and limitations of opting for a transformation based on local markets.

Fátima Santos-Izquierdo, Marina Montiel-Cesares and Yolanda Romero-Padilla analyse the case of **Málaga** from the perspective of social movements opposing processes of touristification. The authors identify some trends in urban spaces connected to potential changes in tourist dynamics. Although these are ongoing processes, they find that despite the vulnerability of the tourism developed over more than a decade exposed by the health crisis, the inertias and interests of tourism capital and real estate are exerting pressure to continue in the same direction. These interests influence the public authorities to adopt measures favouring the reactivation of tourism, particularly in businesses, hospitality and the restaurant sector, in the form of relaxing restrictions or through greater flexibility by, for example, opening up outside terrace areas for bars and restaurants or extending trading times. At the same time, they promote projects with funding that is predicted to further entrench tourism as a way of reproducing capital in the city. The authors conclude that the local authorities have no political will to change the model. In this context, they also find that social movements feel their criticisms of the touristification model and demands for change have gained legitimacy in light of the consequences of the crisis, and identify a need to stimulate a process to transform tourism and its effects in urban dynamics. The unviable nature of the current growth of tourism, threatened on multiple fronts, gives these movements confidence that their stances and proposals are relevant.

In their study of Palma, Mallorca, Macià Blázquez and Francesc Casañas describe how in many cities, capital used touristification as a way to come out of the 2008 global financial crisis, which halted the reproduction of capital. Tourism shifted from its traditional sites into places that were already constructed, but that had not previously been considered by the tourism sector. One manifestation of this process in the historical centre of Palma was the conversion of residential accommodation into short-term lets for tourists and, mainly, top-end hotels, which is the focus of the article's analysis. The process was supported by the State through promotion programmes and legal modifications, combined with a business-centred vision of public management in the city. This had multiple social consequences related to gentrification. Once public discontent began to spread, however, in a second phase public administrations began attempting to restrict further growth. This had the effect of raising the value of these new hotels, therefore creating barriers to their possible future reconversion. In this context, despite the severe crisis in international tourism due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the initial predictions that sales of assets would intensify do not appear to have been fulfilled. The authors show that, in addition to their regular tourism activity, these top-end boutique hotels are financially profitable as property investments: rather than selling them, owners are using these properties as a secure place to hold their assets until the market recovers and they can extract higher returns. The authors therefore show just how deep the touristification process runs in the urban environment, and the complexity of a process that does not operate in one single direction, and which can therefore be a major hurdle to any transition that could potentially reverse the specialist tourism boom of recent years.

Cristina Oehmichen identifies the effects of the COVID-19 crisis in urban areas with high touristification, in this case, the historic centre of Mexico City. The temporary halting of international tourism emptied its streets of tourists, with drastic effects for many businesses and severe job losses. In turn, this situation exposed the vulnerability of depending on one over-specialised form of tourism. However, over these months other tourism practices have emerged in the historical centre, initiated by residents of Mexico City, who, as in other large tourist cities, have managed to reclaim and rediscover places from which they had been displaced. These shifts blur the boundaries between tourism and daily life, while at the same time interweaving conceptual borders between tourism, leisure and recreation. By foregrounding the needs and practices of the great majority, traditionally ignored in tourism policies and also in academic studies, we observe new realities that are not fully understood. The ways in which many of these sectors do tourism, or want to do tourism, opens up possibilities for non-standardised cultural practices that are willing to reinterpret tourism from the perspective of new demands.

Finally, we have an interesting look on a national scale at the evaluation of the impact COVID-19 has had on different tourism sectors, with a characterisation of its impact on city tourism. Enrique Cabanilla, Carlos Garrido and Edison Molina present the results of various studies they have participated in since March 2020, focusing on business, domestic demand and human talent. Of particular note is the use of maps to delimit urban and rural spaces, alongside a robust methodology with three national surveys. The analysis shows that although cities have been hardest hit by the pandemic due to the closure of businesses and resulting unemployment, the increase in domestic demand for local tourism has favoured a certain recovery of city tourism.

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