

# Is Unconventional the New Normal in Tourism?

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The phenomenon of tourism, driven by individuals' desire to experience something new, different, or otherly, has seen significant changes. In this ongoing process, new tourist segments with specific motivations and behaviors have emerged [1,2]. As MacCannell (2018:6) argues, the tourist is "a figure worthy of all the attention we might give it to understand what is going on around us". In this light, contemporary tourism has become a reflection of a symbiotic relationship between travel and its social functions. In recent decades, participation in tourism has almost become a lifestyle of its own: I travel, therefore I am!

In the 21st century, international tourism increased from 700 million to 1.5 billion between 2000 and 2019. In the post-pandemic travel climate, numbers have continued to rise. Well-known tourism destinations and attractions continue to draw an impressive number of tourists, and the rise in popularity of minor or previously 'hidden' destinations is unquestionable. Through globalization processes, increased access to information, increased standards of living over the past two decades, and social media and other internet-based technology, these formerly hidden attractions and less visited destinations are now able to draw tourists from all over the world. In parallel, the pluralization of the tourism industry means that the supply side has experienced an impressive geographical expansion. Every corner of the world has now become a tourist destination and, due to the democratization of tourism, tourism demand has grown significantly. The mere concept of the 'tourist experience' has also widened. Today, practically anything related to a journey can be interpreted as a tourist experience [3]. Thus, alongside the range of experiences designed and managed by destinations, 'prosumer' tourists create, live, and communicate about their travel experiences on social media [4].

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism had already permeated all spaces of experience, reaching every country, region, and corner of the globe [5]. In recent decades, the meanings, implications, and roles of tourism have also expanded significantly [6,7] from a purely leisure and pleasure-driven mobility to any sort of overnight travel away from home for almost any reason at all. People's strong desire to travel during the pandemic contributed to the current acceleration of tourism mobility we now witness everywhere. The contributions to this Special Issue focus on unconventional tourism mobilities. This concept refers to trips that are uncounted, or statistically invisible, because they involve same-day travel, utilize informal or illegal accommodations, or manifest in other ways that are not typically enumerated in tourism statistics. The activities undertaken and the experiences sought are less relevant to this phenomenon than the fact that they are 'invisible' to national and global statisticians and gatekeepers.

In fact, unconventional tourism is an umbrella term that covers most kinds of unregistered or unaccounted tourist mobilities (e.g., stays at second homes, same-day return visits, illegal home rentals, or visiting friends and relatives), some of which might not appear to



**Citation:** Timothy, D.J.; Michalkó, G.; Irimiás, A. Is Unconventional the New Normal in Tourism? *Sustainability* **2023**, *15*, 5366. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15065366>

Received: 3 March 2023

Accepted: 6 March 2023

Published: 17 March 2023



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be ‘tourism’ but should be seen as such in certain localities and under certain conditions (e.g., petty traders and utilitarian shoppers) [8]. Given the growth of unregistered tourist flows and unaccounted leisure (or utilitarian) mobilities, there is a need in tourism studies to apply innovative research methods and to reconceptualize the meanings of tourism in different geographical and social contexts. It is expected that people’s craving for travel in the post-pandemic era [9] will open up new spatial and temporal tourism experiences and behaviors in which unconventional tourism has played an important role. To better understand this phenomenon and to evaluate the development of new approaches to travel and behavioral spatialities, new ways of thinking, new theoretical constructs, and new methodologies are needed. This Special Issue offers contributions that explore unconventional tourism mobilities as described in all their forms, focusing on the geographical patterns, processes and hidden aspects of unconventional tourism.

The opening paper of the Special Issue offers a theoretical pillar for a better understanding of unconventional tourist mobility (Contribution 1). The article highlights that tourism flows that are not statistically measurable are equally as important as those registered at official accommodations for the impacts they generate in the tourism destination. It analyzes the nature of invisible tourism, highlighting the specificities of uncounted trips of many kinds. Its authors—the guest editors of the Special Issue—call for additional research on unconventional tourism mobilities and recommend developing methodologies that will help us gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

In this light, the first part of the theme issue brings together innovative methods for exploring unconventional tourist mobility. Making the invisible flows of tourism visible is no easy task, perhaps most akin to criminal investigations, as researchers exploit the clues left by tourists rather than tangible and accountable data provided by border crossings or lodging records. Mobile Positioning Data (MPD) contains billions of pieces of information generated by tourists’ mobile phones, which can be used to understand tourist flows and the duration of their stays (Contribution 2). Understanding tourists’ spending outside of accommodation services by using online cash registers (OCR), based on a combination of their movements and consumption patterns, reveals a hitherto lesser-known aspect of transit travel (Contribution 3). Likewise, geotags of photos uploaded on social media reveal the increasing popularity of so-called secondary destinations (Contribution 4). Although databases other than official statistics are extremely difficult to access and have a number of limitations, they nonetheless provide valuable information on unconventional or unmeasured tourism.

The challenges of making tourism sustainable are numerous. Although unconventional tourism mobility is often invisible to destination management organizations, its social and environmental impacts are evident. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, many popular tourist cities struggled with overtourism. As part of the solution, fuzzy linear programming can be used to identify the challenges of overtourism and determine the optimal number of tourists for a given city at any given time (Contribution 5). To manage cities’ tourism carrying capacity, alternative routes and experiences are recommended. Contribution 6 considers the tourist trend to visit heretofore nearly neglected urban green spaces such as historical cemeteries. The use of autonomous vehicles (AVs) in cities has several benefits, including making urban mobility green and sustainable. Travelling by AVs itself can become a unique tourist experience and can make tourism more accessible for people with disabilities, as demonstrated by Contribution 7. The implementation of sustainable development principles requires responsible behavior both by the service provider and the tourist.

As already noted, the COVID-19 pandemic effected an unprecedented decline in tourism businesses. To survive, service providers put all their creative energies into making improvements and innovation, with safety as a priority. Spa towns, for example, in addition to their traditional market segments (senior tourists), began targeting families with young children, and they had to reconceptualize their offerings (Contribution 8). In tourism innovation, the need and desire for safety have induced numerous info-communication

developments, such as the DIS:CO (design communication)-based application. This innovative application offers personalized, real-time feedback on tourists' health conditions and helps to build trust between consumers and service providers (Contribution 9). Unconventional tourism in the Metaverse is a phenomenon yet to be explored and understood. Contribution 10 provides an overview of the main tendencies in the domains of tourism and food and the consequences for research applications. According to the authors, the Metaverse can become an important tool for promoting and advancing tourism research and to foster virtual and digital collaboration among service providers, academia, and tourists.

Innovative product developments have played a key role in supporting unconventional tourist mobility. In making cycling tourism more experiential, a symbiosis of body (optimal physical exertion) and soul (effective personal development) was created on Hainan Island, China (Contribution 11). The increasingly intensive development of knowledge societies has also generated new products in the global tourism industry. Thus, the case study of the Chinese university city of Guangzhou can be of considerable help to destinations wishing to engage in scientific tourism in order to create their own evaluation matrix (Contribution 12).

The aim of this Special Issue is to raise awareness of unconventional, invisible, and uncounted forms of tourism—concepts not readily found in mainstream tourism research but which are extremely important, especially in certain destinations, such as borderlands, peripheral regions, and urban areas. The contributions in this theme issue illustrate that not all tourism is measurable, or even definable, in every context. Thus, human mobilities, more broadly as unconventional tourism, should become more prominent in tourism studies and in other disciplines that are concerned with human mobility and the use of space for leisure or utilitarian purposes.

### List of Contributions

- 1 Timothy, D.; Irimiás, A.; Michalkó, G. Unconventional Tourist Mobility—A Geography-Oriented Theoretical Framework
- 2 Kovalcsik, T.; Elekes, Á.; Boros, L.; Könnyid, L.; Kovács, Z. Capturing Unobserved Tourists: Challenges and Opportunities of Processing Mobile Positioning Data in Tourism Research
- 3 Tóth, G.; Kincses Á. (In)Visible Tourism According to Online Cash Registers in Hungary, 2018–2020
- 4 Kádár, B.; Gede, M. The Measurable Predominance of Weekend Trips in Established Tourism Regions—The Case of Visitors from Budapest at Waterside Destinations
- 5 Garrido, B.; Sebrek, Sz.; Semenova, V.; Bal, D.; Michalkó, G. Addressing the Phenomenon of Overtourism in Budapest from Multiple Angles Using Unconventional Methodologies and Data
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- 8 Könnyid, L.; Váradi, Zs.; Nagy, Zs.; Ilyés, N.; Horváth, H.O. The Changes in the Demographic Characteristics and Spatial Structure of Tourism Demand in the West Balaton Region's Spa Cities
- 9 Megyeri, G.; Boros, K.; Fekete, B. A Theoretical Concept of an Innovative and Sustainable Product Based on an Unconventional Approach to Design Development
- 10 Monaco, S.; Sacchi, G. Travelling the Metaverse: Potential Benefits and Main Challenges for Tourism Sectors and Research Applications
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- 12 Guo, W.; Wu, D-F.; Li, Y.; Wang, F-X.; Ye, Y-Q.; Lin, H-W.; Zhang, Ch-F. Suitability Evaluation of Popular Science Tourism Sites in University Towns: Case Study of Guangzhou University Town

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization—G.M., A.I., D.J.T.; Writing—original draft preparation, A.I., G.M., D.J.T.; Writing—review and editing, D.J.T., G.M., A.I. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Acknowledgments:** This editorial was done in the framework of the OTKA K134877 research project supported by National Research, Development and Innovation Office (NKFIH). The special issue was supported by The Hungarian Tourism Association Foundation (MTSZ).

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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