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Vaccine Passport: Dilemmas around the Global Pandemic and Tourism

Passaporte Vacinal: Dilemas ao Redor da Pandemia Global e do Turismo

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ABSTRACT:

With more than 120 million infected people and 2 million victims, Covid-19 [SARSCoV2] situates as one of the most devastating disasters of the twenty-first century. The pandemic virus not only disseminates through the tourism sector but also paradoxically the tourism is its main victim. Since global economies teetered on the brink of collapse, the vaccine ignites a hot-debate revolving around the vaccine passport which means a document issued to those inoculated tourists. It means that those tourists coming from richer countries who access rapidly to the vaccine will start to travel with health passports while others citizens who dwell in poor societies will be left in complete immobility.

KEYWORDS: Tourism, Covid-19, Vaccine Passport.

RESUMO:

Com mais de 120 milhões de pessoas infectadas e 2 milhões de vítimas, Covid-19 [SARSCoV2] se situa como um dos desastres mais devastadores do século XXI. O vírus pandêmico não só se espalha pelo setor do turismo, mas também, paradoxalmente, o turismo é sua principal vítima. Como as economias globais estiveram à beira do colapso, a vacina veio como solução, mas acendeu um debate acalorado em torno do passaporte vacinal, um documento emitido para os turistas inoculados. Isso significa que os turistas provenientes dos países mais ricos, que têm acesso rápido à vacina, começarão a viajar com passaportes vacinal, enquanto outros cidadãos que vivem em sociedades pobres serão deixados em completa imobilidade.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Turismo, Covid-19, Passaporte Vacinal.

COVID-19 AND VACCINE PASSPORT

With more than 120 million infected people and 2 million victims, Covid-19 [SARSCoV2] situates as one of the most devastating disasters of the twenty-first century as well as a great challenge for mankind in the years to come. This virus outbreak not only disseminates through the modern tourism industry but also paradoxically it is its main victim (Baum & Hai, 2020). The overcrowded cities, associated with the current transport means which connect cities in hours, served as real carriers of Covid-19 which become an unparalleled global pandemic in months. To date [on March 14 of 2021] the most affected countries were the United States [546.700 victims] followed by Brazil [277.216], India [158.762], Mexico [194.490], the UK [125.516], and Italy [102.145]. It is important not to note that these numbers are in constant change.

As the previous backdrop, governments unilaterally disposed from the closure of airspaces and borders while a strict lockdown was imposed to stop the mass contagion. This affected seriously not only the tourism industry but also paralyzed global trade worldwide. Thousands of tourists were stranded abroad, abandoned in the mid of a sanitary crisis as never before. Scholars have debated around two clear-cut poles. Those voices interested in Covid-19 as the re-foundation of the new sustainable tourism industry (Prayag, 2020; Gossling, Scott & Hall, 2020; Higgins-Desbioles, 2020) while others focus on the reinvention of tourism research: so, to speak, in a world without tourists' researchers should adopt new epistemologies as well as a multidisciplinary approach (Wen, Wang & Kozak, 2020; Wen, Wang, Kozak, Liu & Hou, 2020).

The question of whether John Urry (2002) formulates his notion on the tourist-gaze, which works as a dispositive that helps to capital replication, sets the pace to a new feudal tribe where tourists become an undesired guest. Urry's cosmopolitan world was open to capital expansion, what can be gazed at or not depends on a much deeper cultural matrix that conditions the tourist landscape, but in a post-Covid-19 context, the global geography has certainly fractured into hundred pieces. Tourists are demonized and carefully monitored as potential carriers of a lethal virus. The tourist gaze is replaced by the figure of the wicked-gaze (Korstanje, 2020).

In consonance with this, Mostafanezhad, Cheer & Sin (2020) have not only alerted on the risk of geopolitical tension among nation-states, but also to the rise of racist discourses against Asian tourists in the West. In this climate of feudalization, international laboratories and scientists worked hard to find a vaccine to recover the stability and economic prosperity of new normality. Since global economies teetered on the brink of collapse, the vaccine ignites a hot-debate revolving around the vaccine [health] passport which means a document issued to those inoculated tourists who had enough antibodies before Covid-19. The health passport denotes who has been vaccinated or tested for the Coronavirus certifying a so-called immunity. This point wakes up some controversies and long-dormant questions which deserve to be discussed.

At a closer look, the history of passport speaks to us of the problem of the outsider and the homeland security. The passport was medieval documents issued to travellers who need to move from one to another city. The document signalled the beholder's identity as well as the entrance gate number. Any outsider has temporal permission to stay at the city – under the auspices of the King – for businesses, leisure, trading, or any other purpose. Etymologically speaking, the term passport stems from the words pass [crisscrossing] and porte [lat.] which means gate. King Henry V of England is the first pioneer in coding a system of modern passports to identify and classify outsiders. Through a novel passport system, these unknown visitors proved their real identity.

Of course, the rite of hospitality closes the tension generated by host-guest encounters (Korstanje & George, 2020). As Derrida (2000) puts it, hospitality is offered or not, but in any case, two questions remain: who are you and what do you want? It is safe to say that either identity occupies a central position in the configuration of the rite of hospitality or destination security. What seems to be more important, in the global world passports take part in a hierarchal system of nationalities where some have access to multiple destinations while others are seriously restricted or limited to present further documentation.

In the days earlier the pandemic, the world divides into stronger and weaker passports. Nowadays, travel bans and restrictions that are being imposed on foreign and domestic tourists grind the tourism industry into a halt transforming not only our travel behaviours – without mentioning the global geography – but the nature of passport. Besides the question of identity, the passport of the future will be designed to distinguish who is a safe [sane] visitor from a potentially infected one.

The health [vaccine] passport poses a serious philosophical dilemma for those who refuse to be vaccinated. If persons who reject the vaccine are not endorsed to a health passport, then they are unable [hand-tied] to move. In this respect, the universal right of traveling – at least as it was discussed in earlier works [see furtherly on Bianchi, Stephenson & Hannam, 2020; and Baum & Hai, 2020) – is being transformed according to the levels of immunity of tourists marking the start of new mobility: pandemic mobilities.

Last but not least, the Passport of the global era tested the credibility of visitors as well as their identity and travel purposes while the Covid-19 passport scrutinizes closely on human biology [knowing whether the tourist is infected or not]. Although these passports are widely supported by digital technologies and platforms creating a revolution in the tourism industry, no less true is that in this new feudalized world, the option of lying about our real identity [a point very well noted in migrants' story-lives] is no longer possible.

Identity is culturally negotiated and cemented whereas immunity is biologically determined. Identity can be falsified or fabricated but not immunity. Besides, those tourists coming from richer countries who access

rapidly to the vaccine will start to travel with health passports while others citizens who dwell in poor societies will be left in complete immobility. In past, capital marked the difference between tourists and vagabonds – citing Bauman – but now the sanitary reasoning is taking the lead in dividing desired from undesired guests (Korstanje & George, 2020).

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