

Holiday Awareness

Joy is over; the summer holidays are finished. Back in our office chairs, all that remains are photographs, souvenirs and memories that suddenly pop up while we do our job as usual. Is it a case of development that holiday destinations are gradually becoming more distant? The obligation nowadays seems year by year to travel farther. Why do we rush to the other side of the world to visit the sites described and pictured in travel guides and seen by millions and millions before us?

We might be seeking green environments, historical places and, above all, sun. However, tourism matches all but the 'going green' paradigm. The vehicles, whether cars, planes or boats, necessary to cover long distances all consume massive amounts of fossil energy, and the same goes for the air conditioners used to cool hotel rooms while heating the outside atmosphere. The effects of tourism on climate change is rarely questioned, maybe because going from home to as far away as budget allows has become an unwritten universal human right, perhaps as compensation for hard or unsatisfying labour.

It's quite a mystery why human nature dictates that we spend holidays so far from home. There is only one sun, and people everywhere cook by boiling water. Television, internet and their content have created a monoculture all around the world, one saturated by US dominance, despite the persistent proclamation that we live in a multicultural society. It is therefore quite incomprehensible that tourism is exempt from discussions concerning climate change. How to create awareness that touring around may be good in the short run for the human soul, but bad in the long run for planet Earth - and thus for future generations?

Geo-information technology may be of help. Nearly everybody today has a mobile phone somewhere on or near his body; not just a communication device but also enabling rough positioning. If providers were willing to co-operate, a wealth of displacement information on virtually the entire world population could be made available, all of course within the bounds of privacy laws, which once processed, analysed and mapped by a GIS provides insightful and convincing information on how our thoughtless choice of distant holidays harms planet Earth. Google Earth would be a good means of dissemination. What about helping holiday planning by flagging up not just the cheapest flight from, for example, Taiwan to Istanbul, but also the size of the traveller's carbon footprint?

As Robert Louis Stevenson, writer of *Treasure Island*, had it, 'To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive'. The joy is in the getting there. The best vehicle, therefore, is a slow vehicle.