Lessons from COVID-19 for the future: destination crisis management, tourist behaviour and tourism industry trends

Carolina Aldao, Dani Blasco and Manel Poch Espallargas

Abstract

Purpose – *This research aims at arriving at a broad scope of the lessons learnt after two years of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic outbreak by analysing the catalyst and inhibiting factors within three aspects of the tourism sector: destination crisis management, tourist behaviour and tourism industry trends.*

Design/methodology/approach – *The methodology of this paper involves semi-structured interviews with high-ranking European travel agents as the agents represent the intermediates between the tourism offer and demand.*

Findings – *Data obtained from travel agents disclosed the factors that catalysed and inhibited the destination, the behaviour of tourists and the tourism industry trends. By contrasting data with previous literature, constructing an overview of the positive and negative outcomes of the pandemic in the tourism sector is possible.*

Practical implications – *Governments, destination marketing and management organisations and tourism and hospitality organisations could learn from the lessons of COVID-19 outbreak to cope better with future disruptive events affecting the tourism industry.*

Originality/value – *The paper is novel as it is the first overview that attempts to synthesise the lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic in the tourism sector by analysing tourism sector's three dimensions: the destination, the tourists and the industry.*

Keywords *COVID-19 pandemic, Disruptive event, Impact, Crisis management, Tourist behaviour, Tourism industry trends, Travel agencies*

Paper type *Research paper*

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1. Introduction

The tourism industry is one of the most vulnerable sectors of the economy and extremely sensitive to the negative effects of a disruptive event. In the aftermath of sanitary crises and disasters, the tourism industry has historically shown remarkable resilience (Ioannides and Gyimóthy, 2020). Local, regional and national governments have all played a part in assisting recovery after any crisis. The pandemic has provided evidence of the multidimensional impacts on different aspects of society: from the psychological comfort to health issues, social, economic, cultural, political, technological and environmental impacts, all of which contributing to a complex scenario as the interplay of the many elements leads to unexpected outcomes (Aldao *et al.*, 2021).

The ability of stakeholders to forecast the future is critical for a strong tourism revival (Ritchie and Jiang, 2019). The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has made a shift in tourists' travel behaviour and consumption patterns. The latest data are indicators of how the pandemic has impacted travel behaviour and how it has changed tourists' standpoint and trust concerning travel services (Cristina-Andrada *et al.*, 2020; Lee *et al.*, 2021). Perceived risk during complex and

uncertain times affects the consumption of services (Kirk and Rifkin, 2020; Matiza, 2020; Neuburger and Egger, 2020; Shamshiripour et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2021). Previous studies (Karl et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2021; Sánchez-Cañizares et al., 2021) have paid attention to tourists' fears and needs and their perception of travelling in the post-COVID-19 era by showing evidence of empirical data in an attempt to reduce the impact of the pandemic on the travel market. Data on operationalisation of aviation, hotels and mobility are crucial for the planning of a trip as well as a tool for monitoring the pandemic's effects and tourism recovery at a local, regional and international level (Yang et al., 2021). Forecasts allow visitors, stakeholders and policymakers to estimate future demand (Liu et al., 2021).

In the post-COVID-19 era, resilience in the tourism sector was highly linked to crisis management in order to reset the industry. Thus, crisis management represents the tool for implementing measures aimed at preparedness and planning strategies, response to crisis and recovery and crisis learning and long-term resilience actions (Ritchie and Jiang, 2019). With constant uncertainty being the main characteristic of a disruptive event such as a pandemic, the tourism sector experienced never-ending backwards and forwards activities that cause unstable behaviour and consumption patterns, as well as adaptive trends in an attempt to revive the sector. The aim of this paper is to investigate the catalyst and inhibiting factors that act as lessons in the aftermath of a pandemic. After two years of the COVID-19 outbreak, there is enough evidence to do a prospective study that can help broaden available research in specific areas such as destination crisis management, tourist behaviour and tourism industry trends. The following research question represents the basis of this study: What are the lessons that have been learnt from catalyst and inhibiting factors concerning the destination crisis management, the tourist behaviour and the tourism industry trends in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic? Findings from interviewing high-ranking European travel agents will help design an overview, concluding the positive and negative precedents of the pandemic that can help mitigate future disruptive events in the tourism sector.

The paper is presented in five sections. Section 2 entails the literature review that defines the multidimensional impacts of a disruptive event such as the COVID-19 pandemic. It also addresses previous literature concerning three aspects of the tourism sector: destination crisis management, tourist behaviour and tourism industry trends. Section 3 describes the methodology applied to this study. Section 4 reveals the findings of the catalyst and inhibiting factors of the pandemic in the three aspects already described. Section 5 reviews the lessons that the pandemic led in the travel sector.

2. Literature review

Tourism evolves in a non-linear way (Baggio, 2008; McKercher, 1999), and therefore, it is not subjected to the classical life cycle according to Butler (1980). Disruptive events like the COVID-19 pandemic led to a devastating turn of events that caused critical change in the perception and behaviour of tourists. According to Aldao et al. (2021), the complexity of the tourism system needs to be addressed by analysing its factors that drive towards a crisis and its impact. In this way, it is possible to evaluate mitigation steps for a fast-forward recovery on an empirical level (Ritchie and Jiang, 2019).

Any disruptive event can be measured in a series of impacts: psychological, health care, social, economic, cultural, technological, environmental and political (Aldao et al., 2021). However, in order to transform tourism into a resilient industry, those impacts need to be related to each stakeholder individually. Disruptive events can affect people in masses or individually and at a collective or institutional level. The individual level is represented by tourists and residents of a destination. The collective level is attributed to tourism and hospitality organisations and institutional level representing the governments and destination marketing organisations (DMOs). Accordingly, psychological impacts are inclined to be linked to people on an individual level, whereas the social, economic, cultural, environmental and technological impacts are collectively

inclined. Political and healthcare impacts are attributed to be managed by the institutional level. All the impacts and the level of influence constitute different degrees of complexity with unexpected situations when a disruptive event hits the tourism industry (Postma and Yeoman, 2021).

Literature arises from the three levels of stakeholders already presented: tourists and residents, tourism and hospitality organisations and governments and DMOs. The aim is to extrapolate these stakeholders to approach the following three aspects of the tourism sector: destination crisis management, tourist behaviour and consumption patterns and tourism industry trends (See Figure 1).

2.1 Destination crisis management

Crisis management represents the main tool to help return to normality (Lew *et al.*, 2020). The tourism industry's continuity relies on competent crisis management, both for tourism organisations and destinations (Henderson, 2003; Santana, 2004; Walters *et al.*, 2016), which implicates taking both reactive and proactive approaches (Moe and Pathranarakul, 2006). The more effective management strategies the governments take, the more solid approach towards a faster recovery (Narayan, 2005).

At the outbreak of the pandemic, health and safety represented the first and maybe the only concern. It played a pivotal role when planning a trip since health and safety is related to risk perception. The higher the perception of vulnerability, the higher is the impulse towards developing preventive measures (Gajić *et al.*, 2021; Janmaimool, 2017; Park *et al.*, 2021). Risk perception after a sanitary breakout is subject to daily changes creating different temporary scenarios (Cahyanto *et al.*, 2016).

Health and safety covers a wide range of different areas when related to tourism activity: sense of safety, hygiene, the destination health system and management; guidelines or protocols that a destination follows; application of social distance and health risk involved when visiting a destination. Sense of safety and governmental policies represented the key grounds for incentivising tourists to travel back again after COVID-19 (Choufany, 2020). According to two studies, high standards of medical facilities helped enhance the reputation of a country, and therefore, they represented a powerful feature for attracting tourists (Bhati *et al.*, 2020; Wen *et al.*,

| Figure 1 | The three viewpoints of the tourism sector |

Source(s): Adapted from Aldao *et al.* (2021)
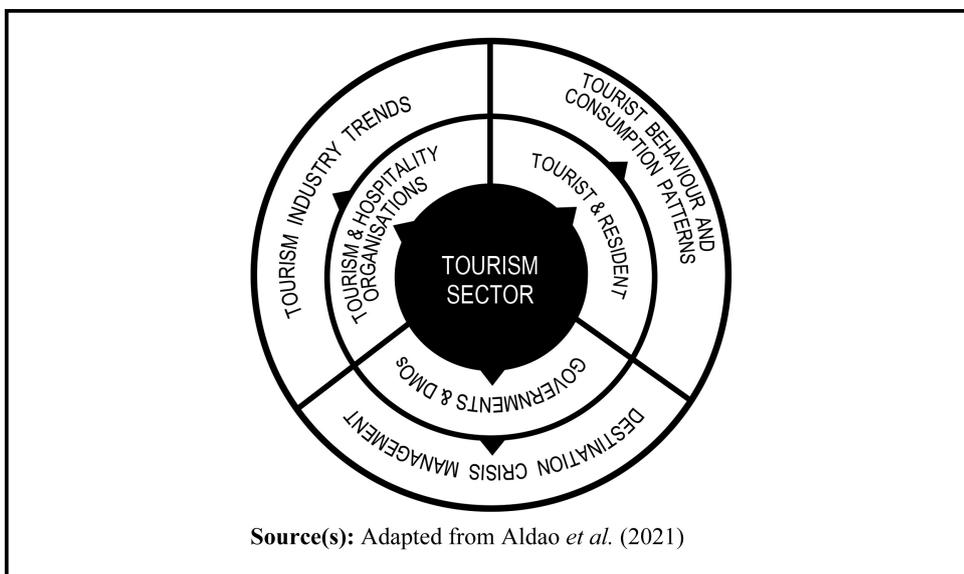
2020). People embraced being able to enjoy tourism whilst still being safe. The advantages of travel outweighed the disadvantages (Bremser et al., 2021).

Health guidelines and sanitary protocols help reduce travellers' anxiety and fears (Cheng and Liu, 2022). These refer not only to those imposed by governments, but also those set up by transport infrastructure and buildings such as airports and aircrafts (International Civil Aviation Organization, 2020). COVID-19 has prompted more stringent containment efforts than in prior disease outbreaks due to its worldwide scope, duration, high level of uncertainty and ability to mutation (Fein, 2021). The introduction of a vaccine had the potential to change public view of the pandemic and mitigate the risk-aversion effects of travel (Boto-García and Baños Pino, 2022; Hidalgo et al., 2022). Therefore, mass COVID-19 vaccination represented the opportunity to increase travel desire and revive international tourism (Boto-García and Baños Pino, 2022; Gursoy and Chi, 2021; Moreno-González et al., 2020; Sánchez-Cañizares et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021; Zhu et al., 2022). Travel desire is observed to lessen the negative influence of vaccine risk perception on vaccination intentions (Gursoy et al., 2022; Williams et al., 2021). It has been observed that those who travel more often had a higher willingness to vaccinate and support pre-trip immunisation (Ekinci et al., 2022; Suess et al., 2022). Thus, this research reflects the opinion of tourism experts as regards the strengths and weaknesses of the destination to cope with the turmoil of COVID-19.

2.2 Tourist behaviour and consumption patterns

COVID-19 has made people reconsider their lifestyle and daily life. Open-air activities, such as walking and cycling, were extensively chosen as favourite activities after lockdown was removed (de Haas et al., 2020; Shamshiripour et al., 2020). Tranquillity and relaxation were two important features when promoting a destination (Ivanova et al., 2020). Nature-based and uncrowded destinations were prioritised (Craig, 2020; Huang et al., 2021; Moya Calderón et al., 2021; Wang and Ackerman, 2019; Wen et al., 2020). According to Ramos et al. (2021), forecasting crowdedness represented a crucial tool for mitigating the pandemic and enhancing tourists' experience at a destination.

Before the pandemic, terrorist attacks, wars and natural disasters threatened the security and safety of destinations causing an impact on visitors' perceptions and choices (Gössling et al., 2020; Rittichainuwat and Chakraborty, 2009). The outbreak of the pandemic caused by COVID-19 had a global omnipresent impact that affected all aspects of human life (Elizabeth et al., 2021). According to Wen et al. (2020), the cancellation of a trip was likely to be associated with countries possessing unreliable medical infrastructure and constant fluctuation of reported cases. In consequence, in the COVID-19 era, the purchase of travel insurance has highly increased (Enger et al., 2020; Uğur and Akbıyık, 2020; Zenker and Kock, 2020). However, tourists are not willing to pay any extras for the implementation of protocols at destinations, since they believe that it is their obligation to do so (Awad-Núñez et al., 2021; Sánchez-Cañizares et al., 2021). Thus, higher willingness to travel is not substantially connected with a higher disposition to pay for major safety precautions (Sánchez-Cañizares et al., 2021). This research aims to analyse the shift in tourist behaviour and how their consumption patterns were changed after the pandemic broke out.

2.3 Tourism industry trends

Due to border closure, domestic travel has played a key role in saving the tourism industry. It represented relief and a strategy for national tourism industries when inbound tourism dropped sharply (Arbulú et al., 2021; Moya Calderón et al., 2021). People prioritised local trips since they were more likely to trust familiar places near their home. Shorter distances meant higher chances of coming back home in the case of a force majeure event (Li et al., 2021; Mirzaei et al., 2021; Viana-Lora et al., 2021). Enger et al. (2020) state that COVID-19 will mark a tendency towards self-guided and self-driven trips and a diminution of tour packages and group travelling. A study conducted by Ivanova et al. (2020) shares that low-cost airlines and long distance buses will remain to be the

preferred mode for low incoming tourists, marking a steady market of consumers that will continue to rely on organised group travel packages and low-cost airline fares.

New products and services were born in the post-COVID-19 era. Tour packages including pre-arranged visits and a detailed itinerary represented the solution for group travellers (Sánchez-Cañizares et al., 2021). Booking and pre-arranged visits were widely adopted as a way of avoiding queues and to better optimise crowds (Wen et al., 2020). Rewards and incentives to travel could help to increase tourism as Janmaimool (2017) states. Procedures in the tourism sector should be digitalised and linked with business models in order to encourage tourists' response (Bausch et al., 2021). Updated technology helps tourism companies run their businesses more efficiently (del Mar Alonso-Almeida et al. (2016). Ivanova et al. (2020) suggest that tour operators should bear in mind economic difficulties of potential travellers, and therefore, they should be smart enough to adapt their offers to the potential demand. According to del Mar Alonso-Almeida et al. (2016), alternative social media networks as a proactive strategy to achieve visibility could attract more tourists than traditional platforms. Another study conducted by Cheung et al. (2021) stated that DMOs that relied on social media had higher benefits by branding their products and fulfilling tourists' needs by informing and offering alternative solutions. Hence, this study's aim is to show evidence of the tourism industry trends in the post-COVID-19 era as a tool to re-direct the efforts towards the regeneration of the tourism activity.

3. Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative method to get a "deeper understanding of social phenomena than would be obtained from purely quantitative methods" (Gill et al., 2008, p. 292). By approaching grounded theory as the research method and thematic analysis as the data analysis method, the aim is to identify patterns on the data collected to construct descriptive and non-generalisable conclusions (Guba, 1990; Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Jennings, 2010). The goal of this study is not to contribute to an absolute finding but to develop a prospective understanding of the catalyst and inhibiting factors that impacted the tourism sector in the post-COVID-19 era.

The researchers focussed the study on Europe to have a clear understanding of the similarities and differences in protocols, guidelines, restrictions, behaviours and trends developed in different countries of the continent with the highest share of tourism worldwide. Travel agencies were chosen as participants. They represent professional experts and the intermediaries of the tourism activity: the tourists, the destination and the tourism industry, the three approaches of this study. Purposive sampling was initially used via the researchers' contacts of travel agents in Spain. Since the aim was to expand the focus to the rest of Europe, snowball sampling was employed to contact European high-ranking members of The European Travel Agents' and Tour Operators' Associations (ECTAA). ECTAA represents the umbrella organisation of travel agents and tour operators across Europe whose aim is to promote economic growth and prosperity in the European travel industry.

Members of the board of directors of ECTAA were separately invited to join a 40-min interview via video-call. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were accurately prepared following the literature review. Questions focussed on health and safety and risk perception, consumer behaviour and consumption patterns and tourism trends, but respondents were free to discuss other topics that were not included in the questions. Interviews were digitally recorded with the interviewees' consent. Data were gathered between May 2021 and September 2021, considering the post-COVID-19 era when countries were vaccinating people. Interviews were transcribed, coded and organised following thematic analysis. Through this method, the empirical data are arranged to reveal trends and provide answers for the study's goal (Gibbs, 2007). Data were classified according to the three viewpoints of the tourism sector described in the literature review. Codification of data implied moving back and forth between each interview for the richness of the coding process. In the results and discussion section, participants' names are coded as P (e.g. P01). However, statements in the findings (P01-08) do not match with the table's list of names (See Table 1).

Table 1	Table of participants	
Name	Position and affiliation	Country
Elena Tanou	Vice president at Top Kinisis Travel	Cyprus
Eriks Lingeberzins	Director at Balticvision Riga Ltd. and member of board at ALTA (Association of Latvian Travel Agents and Operators)	Latvia
Frank Oostdam	Director of the ANVR (Netherlands Association of Travel Associations and Tour Operators)	The Netherlands
Heli Mäki-Fränti	Managing Director at the Association of Finnish Travel Industry (SMAL)	Finland
Jordi Martí	Vice president of ACAVe (Catalan Association of Specialised Travel Agencies)	Spain
Julià Montero	Co-founder of Barcelona Zero Limits (Making Barcelona accessible for all)	Spain
Lars Thykier	Chairman of WTAAA (World Travel Agents Association Alliance)	Denmark
Martí Sarrate	General Director of Julià Tours and president of ACAVe (Catalan Association of Specialised Travel Agencies)	Spain
Source(s): Own elaboration		

4. Results and discussion

This section presents the empirical findings by comparing previous studies and the data gathered. Findings are presented following the three viewpoints described in the literature review: destination crisis management, tourist behaviour and consumption patterns and tourism industry trends.

4.1 Destination crisis management

When a sanitary crisis breaks out, decisions are taken according to what health care professionals dictate. One of the major failures that affected the sense of safety was the lack of unified criteria on the restrictions settled by the European Union. Criteria should have been unified and endorsed by the World Health Organisation (WHO), according to two respondents (P07/P08). This matter reflects that the lack of agreement at a supra-national=level prolongs mistrust amongst travellers. Hence, this idea confirms the importance of unified governmental policies to attract tourists and restore tourism trustworthily as a way to speed up its recovery (Choufany, 2020; Cristina-Andrada et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2021; Narayan, 2005). One interviewee (P06) stated as follows:

> At the beginning, of course, there was fear of the unknown and uncertainty. But at some point, it turned into anger, which probably sometimes makes people be more fearless. This narrative turned into 'we want to travel'. It's enough. We are ready to go on with these conditions [restrictions] but give us a clear and easy understanding of the mechanism and how we can do so. I think at some point this matter of safety goes into a second level.

Health guidelines and sanitary protocols were confusing and not homogenous, since each country set their own safety measures on how to apply them, affirmed two interviewees (P07/P08). Guidelines help to calm down people's anxiety, which concurs with the literature review (Cheng and Liu, 2022; International Civil Aviation Organization, 2020), even though sometimes protocols are useless, according to two other respondents (P02/P04). Likewise, two interviewees (P04/P05) stated that more hygiene regulations certainly influence consumers' choice, but it is highly important to restore faith:

> What is important is what is in people's head and what they perceive as being safe rather than having a protocol. You can come up with as many protocols as you want. If you're considered to be a destination that is not managing its protocols well already, it is not going to make a difference.

One respondent (P02) stated that in the near future people will forget how effectively or ineffectively countries coped with the sanitary crisis. This statement differs with what Bhati et al. (2020) and Wen et al. (2020) state that countries with a high reputation for medical protocols become more attractive. People are likely to travel to destinations that represent an interest for them, even if the

destination's reputation was damaged due to bad crisis management during the pandemic. What is going to change people's opinion when choosing a destination is how nice a place is and how it appears in the media and in their minds, according to one participant (P04).

Vaccination represented a steady opportunity to revive tourism and an effective strategy to help tourism businesses get back to normal activity. As long as the rate of vaccinated people was rising, more and more people felt safer to move around as expressed by Boto-García and Baños Pino (2022) and Hidalgo et al. (2022). Vaccination facilitated international mobility and this motivation was enough to develop a willingness to get the vaccine as stated by one interviewee (P07). This affirmation reinforces the extensive literature that states that the application of vaccines increased travel desire and revived international tourism (Boto-García and Baños Pino, 2022; Gursoy and Chi, 2021; Moreno-González et al., 2020; Sánchez-Cañizares et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021; Zhu et al., 2022). Likewise, the higher the motivation to travel, the higher the intention to get vaccinated (Ekinci et al., 2022; Suess et al., 2022). Still, the lack of unified criteria and the fear that restrictions could change from one day to another did not allow tourists to arrange travel services without concerns, according to another respondent (P06).

4.2 Tourist behaviour and consumption patterns

Tourism has emerged as an activity to disconnect from daily problems and restrictions. One respondent (P03) stated that tourists are eager to take care of their quality time and buy experiences in the way of emotional connection with the destination. Another interviewee (P06) shared that people living in big cities felt stressed about being trapped, wanting to get out of their house. The pandemic drove a willingness to be closer to nature as identified in the literature (Craig, 2020; Huang et al., 2021; Moya Calderón et al., 2021; Wang and Ackerman, 2019; Wen et al., 2020). Tranquillity and relaxation emerged as key factors for promoting a destination as stated by Ivanova et al. (2020). One participant (P08) shared as follows:

> When we were allowed to go outdoors, we did it and we learnt how nice it is. In the past we were very busy and never had the time. So, we thought, ok, this is quality and let's enjoy it and let's change our values, virtues and priorities, like being with the family, with friends, and be more concerned about ourselves and our dearests.

However, the search for tranquillity will not be a tendency in the long run, since according to one respondent (P02), preference as regards uncrowded destinations will end. A small city or town will not be more popular than a big city such as Barcelona, for example. Crowded places before the pandemic will still be highlights in the future, like the Sagrada Familia's Church in Barcelona, Spain. The only inhibiting point is the possibility to travel, which emphasises that risk perception is associated with unstable and changing future scenarios (Wen et al., 2020). One interviewee (P02) stated as follows:

> Barcelona will be Barcelona regardless of how the pandemic was handled there. In the long run, people forget about bad times. The same happens on a trip, in the near future people will not remember if they had a bad dinner at a restaurant or a bad stay at a hotel. They remember the highlights of their trip.

In the medium-long run, COVID-19 issues will be forgotten, because the motivation to experience, to travel, to move around is above fear and anxiety. However, COVID-19 will have a lasting impact, and there will be a target of tourists reluctant to join crowds and look after their health safety. This remark is in line with what Ramos et al. (2021) inform about the importance of forecasting crowdedness to enhance tourists' experience at a destination. The pandemic created habits and these particular habits will remain for a long time according to three interviewees (P05/P06/P08).

According to one participant (P06), during the pandemic, people lost focus on all other possible risks that are related to travel, such as getting robbed on the street, having an accident, a terrorist attack and a natural disaster, which reflects the opposite to what happened prior to the pandemic, as stated in the literature (Gössling et al., 2020; Rittichainuwat and Chakraborty, 2009). COVID-19 has replaced terrorism as one of the highest past perceived risks. Terrorism was generally

perceived as a short-term threat; however, within a short period, destinations generally recovered their tourists, because mass tourism has a short memory. One interviewee (P06) shared as follows:

> If I look back now, on several destinations that there have been, for example, terror attacks and other forms of incidents, this probably has been more short-term impact because we perceive, 'ok, there has been an incident, so I don't go there'. Nowadays with COVID, people are tired of trying to understand what does the orange [restriction] actually mean, what does the Delta variant actually mean, all these different conditions that we have to live with. So, it's more 'can I or can't I travel?'

Generally, travellers are not eager to pay more for additional safety measures at a destination, since they assume that it should be automatically included in the service. This affirmation corresponds to the statement of Awad-Núñez et al. (2021) and Sánchez-Cañizares et al. (2021), where travellers ratify that companies are obliged to set high sanitary standards. According to one interviewee (P08), tourists want hygiene measures to be at the highest level, but they complain when that means more expensive rates. Still, travellers are willing to pay more for travel insurance, since it makes them feel safer, according to another respondent (P02), as described in previous studies (Enger et al., 2020; Uğur and Akbıyık, 2020; Zenker and Kock, 2020).

4.3 Tourism industry trends

During the post-COVID era, tourism was re-structured and some international trips were considered as domestic ones as happened in Latvia. One interviewee (P06) shared that going to Estonia on a weekend was not considered as an international trip. However, this trend was in vogue due to border closure and to ease the return in case of a majeure event as Li et al. (2021), Mirzaei et al. (2021) and Viana-Lora et al. (2021) stated. Besides, the same participant shared that in countries like the Netherlands, Latvia and Cyprus, it is cheaper to travel abroad than spend vacations domestically. For this reason, there is a general trend towards choosing Mediterranean destinations as happened before the pandemic.

Uncertainty due to pandemic restrictions has forced visitors to book travel services last minute. This issue provoked turmoil for the tourism industry, since some services demand to be booked in advance. Good prices and practicality ruled the tourism market in the post-COVID-19 era. There is a trend towards being cautious when spending money. It is the price of a product that encourages consumers to travel, according to two respondents (P07/P08), especially for youngsters, who were the first ones to travel when restrictions were lifted. Low-cost airlines will continue to boom as in pre-pandemic times as explained by one interviewee (P02) which confirms the literature by Ivanova et al. (2020). In tourism, there is a trend to forget the lack of trust in airlines, in regards to the poor management of ticket refunds when the pandemic broke out, as another participant (P07) shared. This reinforces that there is a steady segment of consumers that rely on low fare tickets despite negative travel advice (Ivanova et al., 2020). As Enger et al. (2020) state, there is a tendency in choosing personalised services such as motorhome tourism, which has already increased in post-COVID-19 times as confirmed by one interviewee (P03).

Travel agencies are foreseen to gain popularity since they are the visible face during any problem. Self-driven and package tours in the future will not be influenced by the impact of the pandemic, which confirms the theory stated by Ivanova et al. (2020) that says that there will always be a market for group travelling and contrasts what Enger et al. (2020) expressed about the tendency towards the diminishing of travel packages. One interviewee (P06) shared that tour packages are connected to generational requirements, interests and preferences. There is a generation that feels comfortable enough to travel independently and others that do not, especially in developed societies where travellers want to have everything arranged for them. Flexibility became one of the most appreciated features when booking a trip, since flexibility motivates people to travel, according to two respondents (P03/P06). This theory is in line with what Ivanova et al. (2020) suggested that tourism companies should adapt their offers to the needs of travellers. However, flexibility makes travelling more expensive. One interviewee (P06) shared as follows:

> What is more demanded right now is flexibility, change of dates, change of itinerary and be flexible on cancellation terms.

Social media networks represent a more efficient way of marketing compared to traditional media, as identified in the literature (del Mar Alonso-Almeida *et al.*, 2016). One interviewee (P07) affirmed that since the outbreak of the pandemic, destinations benefited a lot from social media. This confirms what Cheung *et al.* (2021) argue that higher immersion in social media leads to more benefits of engaging potential travellers. In the current era of digitalisation, there is a trend to invest in social media, build loyalty as a credible source of information and be in constant contact with travellers. DMOs collaborate with ministries of tourism trying to create an impact on social media consumers. One participant (P08) stated as follows:

> Before the pandemic, travel agencies and destination marketing organisations were busy focusing on selling, but they did not pay enough attention to details on innovation and promotion on social media.

Following the analysis of the interviews and bearing in mind the literature review, the following figure synthesises the lessons of the positive and negative outcomes of the pandemic through the outlook of the destination crisis management, the tourist behaviour and the tourism industry trends (See Figure 2).

5. Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic represented the most devastating crisis that tourism has faced in the 21st century. The pandemic has shown that tourism is very vulnerable and complex due to the interrelationship between impacts and level of influence. Yet, tourism has proved to be resilient by showing that after two years of the outbreak of the pandemic, there are not only negative but also positive outcomes for the forecast of tourism activity.
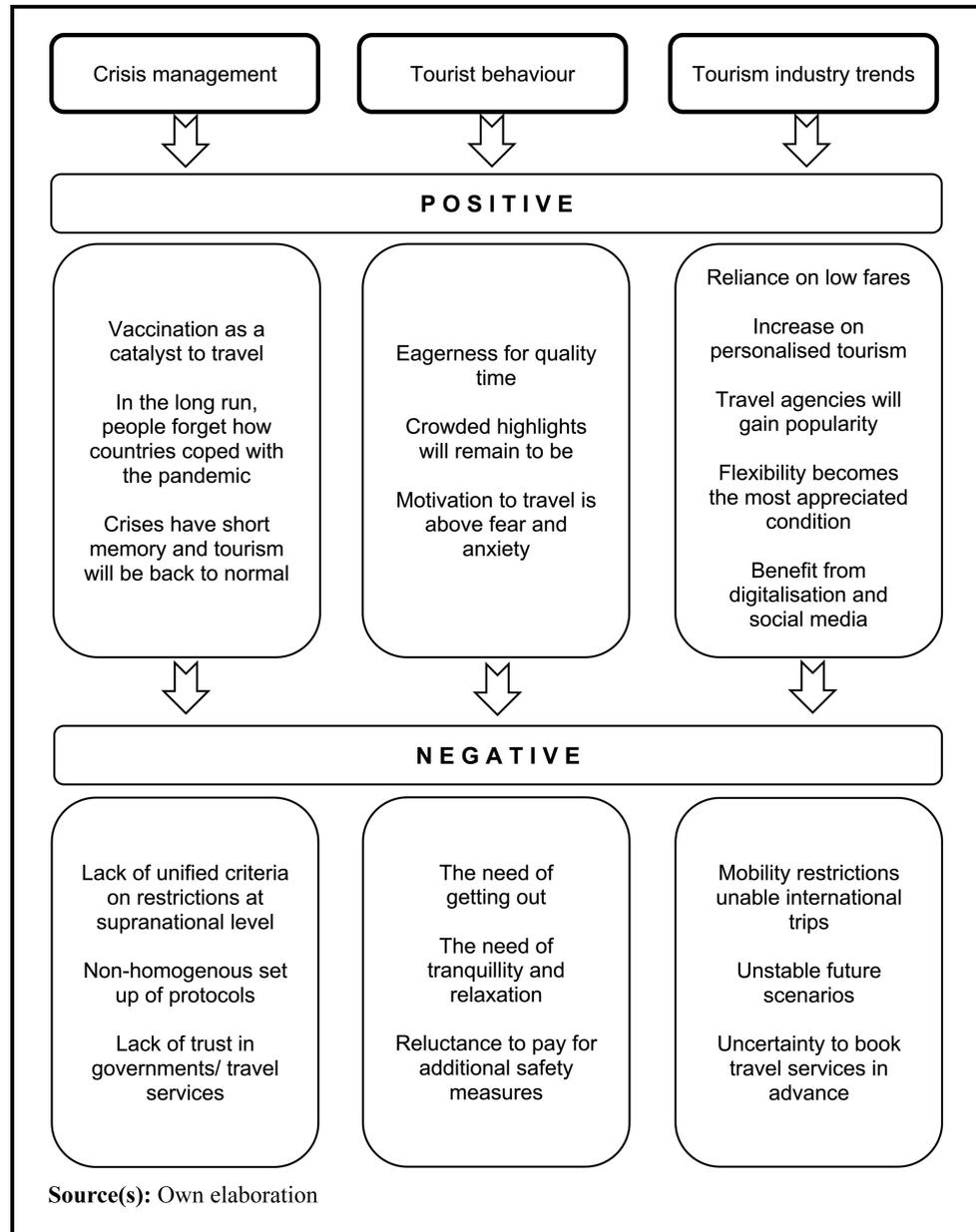
There are many lessons to learn in order to face future disruptive events better. Competent crisis management implies cooperation amongst all stakeholders, both destinations' public and private entities (Campiranon and Scott, 2014), a clear governance structure (Cakar, 2018), as well as an effective balance between public health concerns and economic priorities set up by policymakers (Bremser *et al.*, 2021). The tourism industry urges for a worldwide unified criteria for restrictions and policies. Non-homogenous setup of protocols and lack of trust in governments and travel services has turned into tourists' lack of confidence. Before the pandemic, terrorism and natural disasters were a concern, but after the outbreak, the pandemic was placed as the foremost concern, placing terrorism and other disasters at the back of any tourist's worry list.

The results of this study have emerged from interviews with European high-ranking members of ECTAA, and this source of information may introduce some bias in the results. Hence, further research should be developed including other types of informants such as DMOs, industry representatives and consumer associations, amongst others, in order to complement our findings.

Findings reveal that tourist behaviour and consumption patterns have changed dramatically and evolved alongside the pandemics' evolution. The pandemic has highlighted the need of getting out in search of tranquillity and relaxation, i.e. to buy experiences to enjoy quality time. Motivation to travel suggests that crowded highlights will continue to be visited, leaving fear and anxiety slowly at the backside of tourists' consciousness. The pandemic has also shown that there is a reluctance to pay for additional safety measures. Tourism industry trends observe that good prices represent a catalyst for restoring tourism activity. Moreover, travel agencies are expected to gain popularity. Companies that invest in digitalisation and social media are the ones that obtain the higher benefits. Findings reveal that flexibility becomes the most appreciated condition when organising and booking a trip and the only ally to deal with uncertainty and the constant change of mobility restrictions.

This research has important implications for the management and policy making of tourism at the destination level. Tourism planning and development is mainly based on future forecasts; hence,

Figure 2 Lessons of a long-lasting pandemic in the tourism sector

Crisis management	Tourist behaviour	Tourism industry trends

POSITIVE

Vaccination as a catalyst to travel In the long run, people forget how countries coped with the pandemic Crises have short memory and tourism will be back to normal	Eagerness for quality time Crowded highlights will remain to be Motivation to travel is above fear and anxiety	Reliance on low fares Increase on personalised tourism Travel agencies will gain popularity Flexibility becomes the most appreciated condition Benefit from digitalisation and social media

NEGATIVE

Lack of unified criteria on restrictions at supranational level Non-homogenous set up of protocols Lack of trust in governments/ travel services	The need of getting out The need of tranquillity and relaxation Reluctance to pay for additional safety measures	Mobility restrictions unable international trips Unstable future scenarios Uncertainty to book travel services in advance

Source(s): Own elaboration

the outlines for future scenarios presented in the paper at the destination, the tourists and the industry levels constitute an asset both for researchers and practitioners. Bearing in mind that unexpected events are very complex, unpredictable and maybe unmanageable by definition, destination stakeholders could still benefit from the knowledge of inhibiting and catalyst factors identified during the COVID-19 outbreak to better adapt to future sanitary crises and other disruptive events affecting the tourism industry.

As regards limitations, this study has shown that the several waves and variants during the pandemic have produced an endless turn of events. The long-lasting uncertainty and change of protocols and policies caused ups and downs in tourism activity. This paper hopes for the future care of tourism to avoid repeating the same mistakes again. However, further focus on crisis management research is required in order to inform about the evolution of tourist behaviour and the

transformation of destinations. Hence, future empirical research is needed to analyse the medium- and long-term evolution of the post-COVID-19 era to identify new patterns amongst travellers, if there is a clarification of criteria in the destination crisis management strategies and new trends in the travel industry. Findings could be presented in a timeline and serve as a model to cope with future disruptive events.

6. Role and contribution of each author

Conception or design of the work: Carolina Aldao, Dani Blasco, Manel Poch.

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Data analysis and interpretation: Carolina Aldao, Dani Blasco.

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