UBS Hub presents

The Future of Tourism

Holidays as Public Luxury

The Autonomy Institute

August 2025

Autonomy Institute

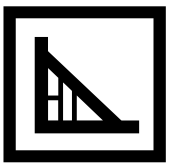
Authors

Grace Robinson
(Université Clermont Auvergne)

Liam Mullally

Autonomy is an Institute which creates data-driven tools and research for sustainable economic planning.

Published 2025 by © The Autonomy Institute



UBS Hub

The Autonomy Institute
Rowhill Road
London
E5 8EB

Contents

Executive summary	4
Introduction: Tourism and the green transition	8
1. Tourism in the UK and worldwide: an overview	12
2. Tourism as public infrastructure	22
3. A sustainable future for tourism	27
Conclusion: The holiday as public luxury	44

Executive summary

Executive summary

"Green New Deal" platforms have called for renationalised, revitalised and expanded public services as a means of climate adaptation. Following these, we consider the tourism industry in terms of **public infrastructure.**

Established tourism practices are ecologically unsustainable and economically extractive. Our analysis is rooted in these observations:

- ↳ Globally, **tourism contributes around ~8% of carbon emissions**, and degrades local ecosystems.
  - → Between 2009 and 2013, carbon emissions from tourism increased from 3.9 to 4.5 $GtCO_2e$, projected to increase to 6.5 $GtCO_2e$ by 2025.

- ↳ The absence of democratic oversight helps to encourage **poor working conditions and over-tourism**.

- ↳ On the assumption that tourists will bring money into local economies, **government interventions have largely been limited to marketing**.

- ↳ **Tourism nevertheless relies on public investment and maintenance** of infrastructures, common natural resources and local cultures.

- ↳ **Rest and leisure are basic needs** shared by everyone, regardless of economic means or the place of their birth.

This report outlines policy proposals which would make tourism more sustainable, more democratic and more equally accessible:

- ↳ **Integrate aviation within a nationalised transport system**. Flying is the most carbon intensive form of travel and yet it also benefits the fewest people. Nationalising aviation will allow us to decarbonise at scale, while also democratising access to long and short-haul travel.

- ↳ **Establish a publicly-owned Eurostar Channel Tunnel train operator** to provide an affordable, low-carbon service between London, Paris, Amsterdam, Brussels and beyond.

- ↳ Use public ownership to **reintroduce and popularise night trains** as a means of accessing Europe.

- ↳ **Introduce a fleet of publicly-owned electric passenger ferries** across the English Channel, and within the UK.

A green transition requires that long-haul travel be slower and less frequent. As such, in addition to 'supply'-focused policy, we suggest some 'demand'-focused measures:

- ↳ **Promote a reduction to the working week.** While new time away from work may lead to greater demand for tourism, it will also make 'slower' forms of transportation more viable and appealing.

- ↳ **Pursue renewed forms of redistribution, such as Universal Basic Income.** Greater economic security for people in low and middle-income brackets could facilitate breaking the existing 'work-spend cycle', in which people compensate for overwork with intense, high-carbon spending habits and leisure activities.

Conceived as ‘public infrastructure’, new opportunities open for designing tourism towards desirable outcomes, even **public luxury**. This includes serving local economies, democracy and shared needs for rest, recuperation and leisure:

- ↳ **Allow Local Authorities to establish “tourist taxes”**. To share the profits of tourism with local communities, and help tackle over-tourism.

- ↳ **Municipal and local ownership of tourism and housing**. This allows for local economies to profit from tourism activities, while also giving residents and workers the authority to manage the tourism in their locality.

- ↳ **Common ownership of land and natural resources.** This would facilitate new ‘common’ spaces for both tourists and local residents to access nature. It would also make it easier to steward the land, and protect it from over-exploitation.

- ↳ **A legal ‘right to roam’.** Only 8% of England is composed of open access land – with the vast majority of the countryside inaccessible to the public. Many are forced to travel and can only access heavily commodified forms of tourism. A legal ‘right to roam’ would open up the country to more sustainable and local forms of tourism.

Introduction: Tourism and the green transition

Introduction: tourism and the green transition

Over recent years, we have seen a proliferation of manifestos and political programmes putting forward distinctive cases for a sustainable, progressive future in the UK.[1] This report looks to add to this growing body of work by making a specific contribution to a sector which is often overlooked, but nevertheless presents vitally important and unavoidable questions to advocates of a 'just transition': the tourism industry.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, tourism and travel came to a near standstill. Both business insiders and academics noted this as a unique opportunity for tourism to break free from business-as-usual and take sustainability more seriously.[2] However, the following years have seen a return to the status-quo: more emissions, worsening over-tourism and the return of insecure, low-paying work.

That the global tourism industry represents a significant ecological and social problem is frequently noted by advocates of a just transition. However, it is not enough for us to simply critique contemporary tourism. Such accounts of course envisage future citizens enjoying far greater leisure time and improved living standards, but these things do not confront the desire to go on holiday. Moreover, the needs met by holidays – including rest, relaxation and leisure – are universal ones which everyone deserves to have met.

Considering the tourism system in terms of its capacity to meet needs makes clear the extent to which its current form is failing to meet certain needs: those of the planet, those of tourism workers, those of the localities in which tourism is concentrated, even those of many tourists.

This report therefore offers a positive vision of what tourism in a just, sustainable society might look like, and how this might be achieved. A vision of how tourism could realise public, not just private, luxury without entailing ecological devastation.

1 Labour for a Green New Deal (2019). ***The Green New Deal Explained***. Available at: https://www.labourgnd.uk/gnd-explained; Green New Deal Rising (2023). ***What is the Green New Deal?*** Available at: https://www.gndrising.org/what-is-the-green-new-deal/.

2 Euronews Travel (2022). ***Connecting People, Places & Planet***. Euronews. Available at: https://www.euronews.com/commercial/news/2023-travel-trend-report/.

A just transition for tourism

While visions of a just, green transition can vary significantly, two central components are nevertheless frequently held in common.

First, as advocates of a *just* transition, many insist that ecological sustainability is accompanied by a drastic reduction in wealth inequality through renewed redistribution to reduce poverty and meet people's needs. This would take place both 'domestically' and 'internationally' by redressing long standing wealth inequality in the UK which, growing for decades, has widened even further following the Covid pandemic and subsequent inflation crisis. This also involves seeing corporations headquartered in the UK pay a fair share of climate reparations to countries who are most affected, but least responsible for, climate change.

Second, just transition advocates also foresee a desirable, sustainable future for the UK involving significant reductions in working time and increases in 'leisure time'. Since the pandemic, initiatives and campaigns for a four-day work week have taken off and last year's UK pilot, involving around 3,000 workers, was an overwhelming success.[3] Studies show that countries that work less also have a lower carbon footprint. A shorter working week is associated with less car pollution in cities from less commuting and shifts to more low-carbon activities like childcare, spending time with friends and family, and home-cooking.[4] The demand for reduced working time is therefore a core component of a just, green transition.

These two central components of just, green transitions – combined with other policies such as improved public services – are likely to increase the living standards and leisure time of significant numbers of people in the UK and abroad. Many, as a result, will become newly-able and interested in going on holiday in the UK and beyond.

This, of course, is to be welcomed. However, it also presents a serious challenge: as advocates of a just, green transition: we cannot simply 'plug these new tourists in' to an existing tourism industry that is already rife with issues of unsustainability, exploitation and over-tourism. We should have little faith in its potential to equitably, democratically and sustainably manage a truly accessible vision of travel and tourism for the future. In short, a just green transition makes the question of a 'just, green' tourism sector even more pressing than ever.

3 Autonomy (2023). *The results are in: the UK's four-day week pilot*. Autonomy. Available at: https://autonomy.work/portfolio/uk4dwpilotresults/.

4 Autonomy (2019). *The Shorter Working Week: A Radical and Pragmatic Proposal*. Autonomy. Available at: https://autonomy.work/portfolio/the-shorter-working-week-a-report-from-autonomy-in-collaboration-with-members-of-the-4-day-week-campaign/

At present, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has attempted to establish tourism as a human right as part of people's right to leisure time and time off work.[5] Mobility and the right to travel, even temporarily, are important for people's well-being. However, the UNWTO's right to tourism implicitly favours tourism as a private industry at the expense of the rights of workers, local residents, the environment, and residents of the Global South, dictating who has the right to travel and for what purpose.[6] Instead, tourism as a human right is precisely why it should be decommodified.[7]

As a first step to broadening and deepening contemporary understandings of just, green transitions, this report proposes a future within which the tourism sector is socialised, managed and maintained as part of 'public infrastructure' in the UK – a future for travel and tourism that is more accessible, sustainable and just for everyone.

5 United Nations World Tourism Organisation (2020). ***Global Code of Ethics for Tourism***. UNWTO. Available at: https://www.unwto.org/global-code-of-ethics-for-tourism.

6 Higgins-Desbiolles, F., Carnicelli, S., Krolikowski, C., Wijesinghe, G. and Boluk, K. (2019). Degrowing tourism: rethinking tourism. ***Journal of Sustainable Tourism***, 27(12), pp.1–19.

7 Higgins-Desbiolles, F. and Russell-Mundine, G. (2008). Absences in the Volunteer Tourism Phenomenon. In: ***Journeys of Discovery in Volunteer Tourism***.

I. The problem with tourism

I. The problem with tourism

Following reports that tourism has "fully recovered" post-pandemic, we should consider the long-term impact of the 'back-to-normal' recovery plans which have delivered this outcome.[8] This section outlines three of the most pressing systemic problems in the global tourism industry: rising emissions, the threat of over-tourism and poor working conditions.

The tourism industry's contribution to global carbon emissions is significant and growing. As a predominantly private industry, dictated by a small number of large corporations and conglomerates operating for profit, tourism faces simultaneous crises of over-production and exploitation. Over-tourism, in particular, has become a growing problem as local residents and the environment are more and more forced to compete with incoming tourists for access and distribution of resources. At the same time, the tourism industry is also known for its exploitative, insecure, and low-paying work. Then, there remains the fundamental issue of deeply unequal access to tourism and mobility for leisure, which remains largely restricted to more affluent residents of the Global North as a result of highly exploitative and dehumanising migration structures that deny involuntary mobility for asylum seekers and climate refugees.

This section of the report demonstrates that the status quo cannot hold: the basic structures of contemporary tourism in the UK and worldwide act as a force for environmental and social harm.

Coupling in tourism growth and carbon emissions

↳ Worldwide

Tourism is a worldwide, growing industry. In 2000, there were 674 million international tourists. This reached 1.19 billion in 2015,[9] and just before the pandemic in 2018, peaked at 1.4 billion international tourist arrivals.[10] Domestic tourism around the world, in contrast, is estimated to occur at an even higher rate – approximately four times larger than the volume of international tourists.[11] The growth and scale of the global tourism industry is, at present, closely coupled

8 UN Tourism (2024). Global tourism set for full recovery by the end of the year with spending growing faster than arrivals. Available at: https://www.unwto.org/news/global-tourism-set-for-full-recovery-by-end-of-the-year-with-spending-growing-faster-than-arrivals

9 World Tourism Organization (2016). *UNWTO Tourism Highlights*. UNWTO. Available at: https://www.unwto.org/archive/global/publication/unwto-tourism-highlights-2016-edition.

10 United Nations World Tourism Organization (2019). *UNWTO Tourism Highlights*. UNWTO. Available at: https://www.unwto.org/publication/international-tourism-highlights-2019-edition.

11 Gössling, S. and Peeters, P. (2015). Assessing tourism's global environmental impact 1900–2050. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 23(5), pp.639–659.

with the sector's carbon emissions.[12] Globally, tourism accounts for approximately 8% of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions,[13] with 75% of energy demand coming from transport.[14] Aviation is especially carbon intensive.[15]

Between 2009 and 2013, carbon emissions from tourism increased from 3.9 to 4.5 $GtCO_2e$, projected to increase to 6.5 $GtCO_2e$ by 2025. During that same period, tourism expenditure increased from US$2.5 trillion to US$4.7 trillion, showing how closely coupled worldwide tourism emissions are from tourism growth.[16] As we approach planetary limits, this is no longer sustainable.

Of course, the environmental impact of tourism is not just about carbon emissions. It also includes land and resource use. Before the pandemic, the worldwide tourism industry's overall environmental impact was projected to double in 25-45 years, despite efficiency measures and technological innovations.[17]

> **'The rebound effect'.** The growth of emissions and associated environmental impacts despite increased efficiency measures and technological innovation are what is known as 'the rebound effect', or the Jevons paradox.[18] A global economic system based on the pursuit of profit above all else means that technological innovations and efficiency measures become the means to extract more profit, which results in more 'rebound' emissions once implemented, rather than as a tool for decarbonisation.

↳ In the UK

Focusing on the UK in particular, tourism is an especially significant sector, both financially and environmentally. In 2019, it accounted for 9% of GDP, estimated at £127 billion in spending. Until the Covid-19 pandemic, the tourism industry in the UK was growing by almost all metrics, estimated at 3.8% growth a year by 2025.

Tourism spending in the UK is split between UK residents and inbound, international tourists. The majority of tourism spending is accounted for by domestic tourists at £100 billion in 2019.[19] In 2019, 122.8 million domestic

12 Lenzen, M., Sun, Y.-Y., Faturay, F., Ting, Y.-P., Geschke, A. and Malik, A. (2018). The carbon footprint of global tourism. *Nature Climate Change*, 8(6), pp.522–528.

13 Lenzen et al., 2018.

14 Gössling and Peeters, 2015.

15 Tyers, R. et al. (2025). *Aviation and Climate Change: Research Briefing*. Available at: https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8826/CBP-8826.pdf

16 Lenzen et al., 2018.

17 Gössling and Peeters, 2015.

18 Ulrich von Weizsäcker, E., Aloisi de Larderel, J., Hargroves, K., Hudson, C., Harrison Smith, M. and Enriquez Rodrigues, M.A. (2014). Decoupling 2: technologies, opportunities and policy options. United Nations Environment Programme and International Resource Panel. Available at: https://www.unep.org/resources/report/decoupling-2-technologies-opportunities-and-policy-options.

19 British Tourist Authority (2020). *Annual Report and Accounts*. British Tourist Authority.

overnight trips were taken in England, Scotland and Wales. 60.5 million of these trips were for holidays, 42.9 million trips to visit friends and relatives, and 16.3 million trips for business.[20] Interestingly, domestic tourists in the UK do not travel far. The biggest share of tourism in each region is made up of residents of that region, except for Wales, London and North West England. For example, Scottish residents account for around 50% of overnight tourism trips in Scotland with North West England the next biggest share after that.[21]

In sum, far less international tourists arrive in the UK than UK residents leave to go on holiday, which makes the UK a net exporter of tourism emissions.

However, if this is the case, and transport accounts for most emissions, why does the tourism industry in the UK have such high emissions? While the majority of UK tourism comes from residents, characterised by shorter journeys – which would imply lower emissions – the proportion of holidays that UK residents take abroad has been steadily rising, and now accounts for just under half of all holidays, at 44% in 2019. This rose from 39% in 2013, while the share of domestic holidays in the same period has fallen.[22] In 2019, UK residents made 93.1 million visits overseas, spending £62.3 billion, mainly for holidays. In contrast, international tourists from abroad made 40.9 million visits to the UK, spending £28.4 billion, in 2019.[23] In sum, far less international tourists arrive in the UK than UK residents leave to go on holiday, which makes the UK a net exporter of tourism emissions.[24]

When these emissions are taken into account, the UK's much vaunted 'carbon reductions' in recent decades are far less substantial than previously calculated. The UK has been praised as a climate leader for its notable emissions reductions since 1990 and in 2019, the UK Government committed to a net-zero target by 2050.[25] However, until recently, the UK Office for National Statistics only calculated the UK's carbon footprint based on territory or production-based emissions, notably excluding international air travel, emissions from UK residents abroad and emissions from imported goods and services. This has been regarded as an incomplete and inadequate calculation of the UK's carbon emissions, particularly in the case of the tourism industry, that has unfairly shifted the burden of emissions onto lower-income and developing countries.

20 VisitBritain (2019). *Great British Tourism Survey*. British Tourist Authority. Available at: https://www.visitbritain.org/research-insights/gb-domestic-overnight-trips-archive.

21 VisitBritain, 2019.

22 VisitBritain, 2019.

23 Office for National Statistics (2020). *Travel Trends: 2019*. Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/leisureandtourism/articles/traveltrends/2019.

24 Lenzen et al., 2018.

25 Harvey, F. (2021). Which country has made the biggest climate commitment? *The Guardian*. 23 Apr. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/apr/23/which-country-has-made-the-biggest-climate-commitment; Office for National Statistics (2019). *Net zero and the different official measures of the UK's greenhouse gas emissions*. Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/articles/netzeroandthedifferentofficialmeasuresoftheuksgreenhousegasemissions/2019-07-24.

Carbon leakage. Territory or production-based carbon emissions accounting is also known as carbon leakage or 'decoupling through burden shifting'[26] where the UK is able to decouple economic growth from carbon emissions by taking advantage of how countries of the Global North have exported their waste and manufacturing activities to low-income and developing countries, leaving them out of national accounts.[27]

Since 2017, estimates from the UK Office for National Statistics have introduced residency-based, or consumption-based, calculations of emissions.[28] This method has included the UK's aviation industry, emissions of residents when abroad and emissions of imported goods and services. For the tourism industry, this means that emissions from UK residents who travel to islands like Cyprus, Malta and Seychelles, for example, are included in UK national accounting, rather than shifting the burden to these countries who are more reliant on overseas tourism and are much more vulnerable to the effects of climate change.[29] However this new accounting method means that we see a much less successful reduction in national emissions than the UK has regularly taken credit for in recent years. Whereas the UK's 'residency-based' or consumption carbon footprint has only decreased by 10% over this time period, emissions on a 'territorial' basis (i.e. only those emissions that occur within the UK's borders) have decreased by 48%.[30]

Having a residency-based calculation of carbon emissions is a much more equitable method of accounting for emissions from higher-income countries, keeping their emissions 'at home' rather than displacing them onto the countries they are visiting. Thus, instead of shifting the burden of emissions onto lower-income countries, in the case of tourism, this ensures that predominantly higher-income countries, who make up the majority of international tourists, 'keep hold' of their emissions. We even see this over-representation of higher-income tourists in UK tourism. In 2019, 67% of visits to the UK were from Europe, spending £12.3 billion.[31] The next biggest share were tourists from the U.S. at 4.5 million visits, the most visits by any single country, with Australia next at 1 million total visits.[32] This trend for UK international tourists is similar worldwide, where most emissions from tourism originate in travel between higher-income countries.[33]

26 Ulrich von Weizsäcker et al., 2014.

27 Roberts, J.T. and Parks, B.C. (2009). Ecologically Unequal Exchange, Ecological Debt, and Climate Justice. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 50(3-4), pp.385–409.

28 Storr, A. (2025). *Carbon footprint for the UK and England to 2022*. Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uks-carbon-footprint/carbon-footprint-for-the-uk-and-england-to-2022#background-to-the-data

29 Lenzen et al., 2018.

30 Storr, A. (2025). *Carbon footprint for the UK and England to 2022*. Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uks-carbon-footprint/carbon-footprint-for-the-uk-and-england-to-2022#background-to-the-data

31 VisitBritain, 2020.

32 Office for National Statistics, 2019.

33 Lenzen et al., 2018.

With this shift in accounting methods, the UK's reductions in emissions are modest at best, compared to the emissions reductions required to reach net-zero. More so, the UK's progress toward net-zero has slowed considerably since the Covid-19 pandemic. The Climate Change Committee's annual 2023 report noted that the UK's progress to net-zero has 'markedly declined',[34] and since then, the UK Government has announced hundreds of new oil and gas licences in the North Sea.[35]

Moreover, emissions accounting only captures one limited, though significant, aspect of tourism's total environmental impact. The tourism industry also has a large impact on biodiversity, fresh water availability and increases a destination's energy and land use – to name but a few effects.

Tourism after the Covid-19 Pandemic

The tourism industry was one of the sectors hit the worst by the Covid-19 pandemic as a result of worldwide travel restrictions. 2020 was dubbed the 'worst year in tourism history' by the UNWTO with 1 billion fewer international arrivals than 2019.[36] In the UK, between February and April 2020, monthly air passenger arrivals fell by 98.3%. In May 2020, turnover fell to 26% of February levels while other industries witnessed a much smaller fall to 73.6%.[37] Oxford Economics have estimated that, in 2020, the loss to the tourism industry resulted in a 1.5% reduction in the UK's GDP.[38]

The Covid-19 pandemic was presented as an opportunity for the tourism sector to make important changes towards net-zero. For example, the UNWTO published recommendations for a green and sustainable tourism industry.[39] Regenerative tourism has sprung up since the pandemic with the aim of promoting tourism that does not harm the local environment nor the lives of local residents.[40] Business leaders have also published the most recent consumer trends that show how people are interested in making more sustainable choices when going on holiday.[41]

34 Climate Change Committee (2023). *Progress in reducing emissions: 2023 Report to Parliament*. Available at: https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/2023-progress-report-to-parliament/, p.8.

35 Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (2023). *Hundreds of new North Sea oil and gas licences to boost British energy independence and grow the economy*. UK Government. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/hundreds-of-new-north-sea-oil-and-gas-licences-to-boost-british-energy-independence-and-grow-the-economy-31-july-2023.

36 World Tourism Organization (2021a). *2020: Worst Year in Tourism History with 1 Billion Fewer International Arrivals*. UNWTO. Available at: https://www.unwto.org/news/2020-worst-year-in-tourism-history-with-1-billion-fewer-international-arrivals.

37 Office for National Statistics (2021). *Coronavirus and the impact on the UK travel and tourism industry*. Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/tourismindustry/articles/coronavirusandtheimpactontheuktravelandtourismindustry/2021-02-15.

38 Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (2021). *The Tourism Recovery Plan*. UK Government. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tourism-recovery-plan.

39 World Tourism Organization (2021b). *Recommendations for the Transition to a Green Travel and Tourism Economy*. UNWTO. Available at: https://www.oneplanetnetwork.org/knowledge-centre/resources/recommendations-transition-green-travel-and-tourism-economy.

40 King, C. and Burns, O. (2021). *Climate Action through Regeneration*. Available at: https://www.regenerativetravel.com/whitepaper-climate-action/.

41 Booking.com (2023). *Sustainable Travel Report 2023*. Available at: https://www.sustainability.booking.com/industryinsights.

Despite these calls for a new approach, the UK Government's plan for the tourism industry since the pandemic has been about the recovery of the industry, the return to pre-pandemic levels of mobility and continued business-as-usual.[42] Business-as-usual for the UK tourism industry follows a neoliberal approach that limits government regulation in the sector, increasing privatisation and marketisation, and the promotion of private business. Government interventions in tourism remain largely limited to the marketing and promotion of tourism destinations to attract as many tourists as possible, who will then go on to spend money in the UK's private tourism sector.[43]

The UK's British Tourism Authority (BTA), also known as VisitBritain, operates largely as a branding, messaging and marketing agency that promotes tourism domestically and internationally, which includes significant power over the UK's image and branding abroad. This includes the promotion of the UK as a harmless, 'soft power' with campaigns such as 'Spilling the Tea on Great Britain' and the late Queen's Platinum Jubilee in 2022.[44] BTA received £54.9 million from the UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport and £10.3 million in commercial income between 2022 and 2023 for the funding of the authority's activities,[45] but only allocates minimal funding to help local tourist destinations manage the influx of tourists and provides only a small amount of support to address the precarious, poor working conditions in the industry. The UK Government's support package for the tourism industry and workers during Covid-19 was adequate, but offered support only during an unprecedented crisis.

Tourism and neo-colonialism Even today, the UK still retains significant economic – neo-colonial[46] – power abroad. Since the 1980s, the worldwide tourism industry has become increasingly owned by a small number of multinational corporations based in the Global North. Structural adjustment programmes by the IMF and World Bank during this period created new markets for foreign tourism to operate and become established in countries of the Global South, replacing locally-owned businesses. The ecotourism, volunteer tourism and package holiday industries, largely marketed to wealthy tourists from the Global North, transfer wealth from tourist destinations to corporations and businesses abroad. Up to 90% of revenue from tourism is leaked out of host destinations as a result of foreign tourism operators, maintaining and worsening existing international inequalities.[47]

42 Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, 2021.

43 Büscher, B. and Fletcher, R. (2016). Destructive creation: capital accumulation and the structural violence of tourism. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 25(5), pp.651–667.

44 British Tourist Authority (2023). *Annual Report and Accounts*, p.13 and p.28.

45 British Tourist Authority, 2023.

46 Nkrumah, K. (1984). *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*. International Publishers.

47 Fletcher, R. (2011). Sustaining Tourism, Sustaining Capitalism? The Tourism Industry's Role in Global Capitalist Expansion. *Tourism Geographies*, 13(3), pp.443–461.

Over-tourism and poor working conditions

The existing global tourism industry creates vast inequalities between the owners of major businesses, and the local residents and workers within tourist destinations. The sustainability issues related to tourism are not just environmental, but social as well. Over-tourism was coined by Skift in 2016,[48] and highlights the simultaneous negative impacts of tourism on local residents and the environment. Fodor's 2023 'no travel' list of locations especially exposed to over-tourism features destinations like Lake Tahoe, California; Antarctica; Venice, Italy; Cornwall, UK and Maui, Hawaii.[49]

In overcrowded European destinations like Venice and Barcelona, municipal authorities have started implementing policies to help with the problems of over-tourism. Venice has introduced a daily tax of €5 for tourists entering the historic centre to generate an additional source of income to help mitigate the negative impacts of tourism. The city has also banned the docking of cruise ships that pollute the city and accelerate the erosion of the city's foundations.[50] Cities like Barcelona, Berlin, London and Amsterdam have issued blanket restrictions on short-term rental properties like AirBnbs to reduce the strain on local property markets.[51]

The indigenous and local people of Maui, Hawaii have a long history of conflict with the tourism industry as a settler colony of the U.S.[52] In 2022, mandatory restrictions on water for Maui County residents were introduced, while the U.S. military and the tourism industry's water use continued unfettered, resulting in Native Hawaiians urging tourists to stay away.[53]

48 Ali, R. (2016). Exploring the Coming Perils of Overtourism. ***Skift***. Available at: https://skift.com/2016/08/23/exploring-the-coming-perils-of-overtourism/.

49 Fodor's Travel (2023). Fodor's No List 2023. ***Fodor***. Available at: https://www.fodors.com/news/news/fodors-no-list-2023.

50 Wilson, N. (2023). The destinations cracking down on overtourism. ***The Independent.*** Available at: https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/destinations-cracking-down-overtourism-venice-b2410622.html.

51 Symons, A. (2023). Where in the world are Airbnb-style rentals banned or restricted? ***Euronews***. Available at: https://www.euronews.com/travel/2023/06/11/italy-malaysia-usa-which-cities-and-countries-are-cracking-down-on-airbnb-style-rentals.

52 Aikau, H.K. and Vicuña Gonzalez V. (2019). ***Detours: A Decolonial Guide to Hawai'i***. Duke University Press.

53 Fodor's Travel, 2023.

Over-tourism, however, also remains a significant issue within the UK. In Cornwall, one of the country's tourism hotspots, problems are directly related to the region's infrastructure and overinflated property market. As a historically rural region of the South West of England, Cornwall's infrastructure remains largely ill-prepared for the massive influx of tourists every year. Tourism in Cornwall generates £1.8 billion a year, but over-tourism has resulted in heavily congested roads, strains on local NHS services and higher than average water and house prices.[54] Meanwhile, the median income in Cornwall is £14,000 and residents of Cornwall are some of the most deprived in the UK.[55] Out of the UK's 10% most deprived districts, 17 are located in Cornwall.[56]

While tourism has a significant impact on the rest of the UK economy, the tourism industry is also a sector notable for its precarious, low-paying work.

While tourism has a significant impact on the rest of the UK economy, the tourism industry is also a sector notable for its precarious, low-paying work. Hospitality and tourism employ 8% of the UK workforce. 86% of those people work in a restaurant, pub or hotel business. These positions are customer-facing and labour-intensive, yet the wages of this workforce in 2019 were 25% below the UK average.[57] More worryingly, recent inflation and cost-of-living crisis in the UK (nicknamed 'austerity by stealth' by the New Economics Foundation)[58] have resulted in a 4.1% drop in real income, the highest in 40 years.[59] This is likely to have had a disproportionate effect on those working on already inadequate wages in the tourism and hospitality sectors. Excluding the transport sector, tourism and hospitality have particularly low unionisation rates which reduces the effectiveness of collective bargaining in those industries for higher pay.[60]

54 Olivier Vergnault (2018). *The real effect millions of tourists have on Cornwall*. Cornwall Live. Available at: https://www.cornwalllive.com/news/cornwall-news/real-effect-millions-tourists-cornwalls-1565889.

55 Elliott, L. (2020). Levelling up Britain: why Cornwall needs more than just tourism. *The Guardian.* Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/mar/04/levelling-up-britain-why-cornwall-needs-more-than-just-tourism.

56 Dinata, M., Driver, A., Evans, O., Gray, M., McWilliam, K., Mohamud, F., Morris, J., Onslow, I., Rowson, D., Sparks, I., Treby, A. and Ward, J. (2022). *A Basic Income for Cornwall*. Autonomy. Available at: https://autonomy.work/portfolio/basic-income-cornwall/

57 Economic Insight (2019). *Hospitality and Tourism workforce landscape*. Available at: https://www.economic-insight.com/2019/10/23/report-hospitality-and-tourism-workforce-landscape/.

58 Caddick, D. and Stirling, A. (2023). *Austerity by stealth*. New Economics Foundation. Available at: https://neweconomics.org/2023/02/austerity-by-stealth.

59 de Hoog, N., Kirk, A. and Osborne, H. (2022). How the cost of living crisis is hammering UK households - in charts. *The Guardian.* Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/business/ng-interactive/2022/jun/21/cost-of-living-crisis-uk-households-charts-inflation.

60 Wood, R.C. (2020). Perspectives on hospitality industry trade unionism in the UK and beyond. *Research in Hospitality Management*, 10(2), pp.137–147.

The tourism industry is also known for its high prevalence of zero-hour contracts and highly seasonal work patterns which results in job precarity and uncertainty. This became evident during the Covid-19 pandemic which had a devastating impact on the industry's workforce. In 2020, there were 111,000 job losses in the tourism sector in the UK.[61] The UK's Job Retention Scheme furloughed 83% of staff in the food and accommodation sectors at its height.[62]

Like many other sectors and industries, the Covid-19 pandemic was a break in the UK's previous approach to tourism.[63] Massive state intervention and aid, totalling £25 billion for the tourism, leisure and hospitalities industries,[64] showed the inadequacy of neoliberal, market-led governance of the sector. Comparatively, the severity of the climate crisis calls for further, more radical intervention in order to improve people's living standards and reach net-zero in the UK.

The hospitality industry, a key sector of tourism, is now paying the price for shedding its workforce during the pandemic. There has been a 72% increase in vacancy rates compared to pre-pandemic levels. Between November 2022 and January 2023, there were 146,000 job vacancies in the hospitality sector.[65] Since the easing of the pandemic lockdowns, the summers of 2022 and 2023 have experienced close to pre-pandemic levels of tourism arrivals.[66] However, Brexit, labour shortages and transport strikes have created a 'summer of chaos'[67] for two consecutive years in a row, affecting UK customs, flights and domestic railway journeys during peak summer times. At the root of many of these problems are the working conditions for staff in these sectors.

61 Misrahi, T. and Jus, N. (2021). ***Staff Shortages***. World Travel & Tourism Council. Available at: https://wttc.org/news-article/uk-travel-and-tourism-sector-sees-a-massive-job-shortfall-of-more-than-200000-this-year-says-wttc-report.

62 Keep, M. and Ward, M. (2020). ***Support for the tourism industry after the Covid-19 lockdown***. UK Government. Available at: https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cdp-2020-0084/.

63 Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020.

64 Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, 2021.

65 Seo, J. (2023). Number of hospitality job vacancies drops to 146,000. The Caterer. Available at: https://www.thecaterer.com/news/hospitality-job-vacancies-drops-ons-nov-jan-2023

66 World Tourism Organization (2023). Tourism on track for full recovery as new data shows strong start to 2023. UNWTO. Available at: https://www.unwto.org/news/tourism-on-track-for-full-recovery-as-new-data-shows-strong-start-to-2023 .

67 Barrell, S. (2022). Summer of travel chaos: what's happening and why? National Geographic. Available at: https://www.nationalgeographic.co.uk/travel/2022/08/summer-of-travel-chaos-whats-happening-and-why.

II. Tourism as public infrastructure

II. Tourism as public infrastructure

In face of the deep-seated problems outlined in the previous section, we now set out an alternative conception of the tourism industry as a form of 'public infrastructure' – considered afresh as an essential component of a broader 'public services', newly revitalised under a just, green transition.

What even is 'the tourism industry'?

The boundaries of the tourism industry can be difficult to define: it includes public and private infrastructure across an array of sectors and industries from hospitality, sanitation and waste, transport, commercial hotels and short-term rentals, cultural heritage sites and public outdoor spaces like parks and promenades. The tourism industry also includes less quantifiable and more indirect aspects, including the 'overall ambiance of a location',[68] like a destination's culture, weather, history and food. In other words:

> *'[Tourism infrastructure] includes all those facilities that tourists use when they leave their homes, reach their destination and return back home…while in reality, most of the tourism infrastructure is constantly used by residents'.*[69]

While most of the tourism sector is composed of private businesses, the private tourism industry nevertheless massively relies on the investment and maintenance of public infrastructure, common natural resources and a destination's culture and history. The private tourism industry competes for access to these resources with the basic needs of local residents and tourism workers in its pursuit of profit.

Tourism is also relied upon for development in countries of the Global South, yet public infrastructure is regarded as an 'essential precondition' for tourism development.[70] Private business prioritises short-term profit above all else, which results in the Malaysian Government, for example, bearing the brunt of the costs in constructing and maintaining the country's tourism infrastructure.[71] Thus, countries that rely on tourism always require a certain level of investment in public infrastructure, which is seen as an investment in the tourism industry, i.e. public money for the profit of private industry. For many countries in the Global South, as already noted, private industry is often based abroad, which funnels profits out of the country.

68 Büscher and Fletcher, 2016, p.652.

69 Mandić, A., Mrnjavac, Ž. and Kordić, L. (2018). Tourism Infrastructure, Recreational Facilities and Tourism Development. *Tourism and Hospitality Management*, 24(1), pp.1–22, p.44.

70 Mandić, Mrnjavac and Kordić, 2018, p.57.

71 Abdullah, S., Abdul Razak, A. and Jaafar, M. (2014). Public Tourism Infrastructure: Challenges in the Development and Maintenance Activities. *SHS Web of Conferences*, 12.

Case study: city of Paris. In 2022, the city of Paris was the most visited city in the world with 44 million visitors, which was still 13% lower than pre-pandemic levels in 2019.[72] Accor S.A. multinational hotel group, based in Paris, has an annual revenue of $2.2 billion with 5,300 properties worldwide,[73] operating approximately 214 hotels in Paris alone.[74]

Privately-owned, multinational conglomerate hotel chains like Accor S.A. would be significantly less profitable and viable in Paris without the city's cultural sites, like the publicly owned Eiffel Tower that draws people to the city,[75] with over 6 million visits every year;[76] the region's metro and rail network, operated by the publicly-owned *Régie Autonome des Transports Parisiens*, transporting 3.3 billion passengers in the Paris Region in 2019,[77] and the city's water and sanitation services publicly-owned by *Eau de Paris*.[78]

Since the late 1970s, the UK has experienced the wholesale privatisation of many public services and utilities. While one could think that this represented a 'fairer' situation with regards to the tourism industry – private tourism corporations depending on the privatised resources of other companies, rather than public money – ultimately, it is still local residents who get the short end of the stick. With the case of water and sanitation in Cornwall, for instance, Cornish residents with South West Water paid £497 in 2017, while Yorkshire residents paid £366 and Greater London residents paid £372, with strong suggestions that the differential can at least be partially explained by the higher levels of tourism in the region during peak summer months, compared to the small number of permanent residents.[79]

72 The Brussels Times with Belga (2023). Paris remains most-visited city in the world, with 44 million tourists in 2022. *The Brussels Times.* Available at: https://www.brusselstimes.com/417329/paris-remains-most-visited-city-in-the-world-with-44-million-tourists-in-2022.

73 Tyson, J. (2015). Who Owns What: Making Sense of the Hotel Chains and Their Brands. *Skift*. Available at: https://skift.com/2015/11/16/who-owns-what-making-sense-of-the-hotel-chains-and-their-brands/.

74 As of 18/10/23 with a quick search on their website for available rooms.

75 Lemoine, B. (2020). *Who owns the Tower?* Available at: https://www.toureiffel.paris/en/news/history-and-culture/who-owns-tower.

76 Tour Eiffel (2020). *15 essential things to know about the Eiffel Tower*. Available at: https://www.toureiffel.paris/en/news/history-and-culture/15-essential-things-know-about-eiffel-tower.

77 RATP Group (2019). *RATP Group Highlights*. RATP. Available at: https://www.ratp.fr/en/groupe-ratp/group-presentation/our-essential-documents.

78 Eau de Paris (2022). *Our Organization*. Eau de Paris. Available at: https://www.eaudeparis.fr/en/our-organization.

79 Olivier Vergnault, 2018.

In comparison, France retains a considerable amount of basic services as publicly owned. In the specific case of water and sanitation, *Eau de Paris* represents a recent success story where the re-municipalisation of water services in the city back in 2009 has helped to reduce the price of water by 8% from its privately-owned predecessor, Veolia and Suez.[80] In the UK, by contrast, the problems of water privatisation have sparked recent controversy with Southern Water fined £90 million in 2021 for dumping billions of litres of raw sewage into the sea, contaminating English coastline ecosystems.[81] At the same time, water bills from private UK companies have increased 40% above inflation and shareholders have walked away with £57 billion in dividends since 1991.[82]

A similar story can be found in the UK energy system with growing calls for renationalisation in recent years, particularly in light of the UK energy crisis,[83] where Ofgem, the UK's energy government regulator, raised the price cap of energy from £1,138 in autumn 2021 to £3,549 by August 2022. This increased the number of people in fuel poverty to 6.6 million and resulted in direct intervention by the UK Government to set a new price cap and provide financial aid.[84] The UK's energy system is one of only 2 countries in Europe that is fully privatised,[85] yet UK residents pay some of the highest energy bills in Europe.[86]

80 Petitjean, O. (2020). Leaving Water Privatisation Behind. ***European Network of Corporate Observatories***. Available at: https://corpwatchers.eu/en/investigations/cities-versus-multinationals/leaving-water-privatisation-behind-paris-grenoble-and-the-advent-of-the-water.

81 Inman, P. (2021). England's water system: the last of the privatised monopolies – for now. ***The Guardian***. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/jul/09/england-water-system-last-privatised-monopolies-for-now-analysis.

82 Laville, S. (2020). England's privatised water firms paid £57bn in dividends since 1991. ***The Guardian***. 1 Jul. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/jul/01/england-privatised-water-firms-dividends-shareholders.

83 Berry, C. (2021). The energy crisis shows precisely why this industry should be in public hands. ***The Guardian***. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/dec/03/energy-crisis-industry-public-hands-bulb

84 National Energy Action (2023). ***Energy Crisis Timeline: How the Energy Crisis unfolded***. Available at: https://www.nea.org.uk/energy-crisis/energy-crisis-timeline/

85 Weghmann, V. (2019). ***Going Public: A Decarbonised, Affordable and Democratic Energy System for Europe***. European Public Service Union. Available at: https://www.epsu.org/article/going-public-decarbonised-affordable-and-democratic-energy-system-europe-new-epsu-report.

86 Askew, J. (2022). Soaring energy prices: How does the UK compare with Europe? ***Euronews***. Available at: https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2022/09/08/soaring-energy-prices-how-does-the-uk-compare-with-europe.

The National Grid. The climate crisis demands investment and construction in the UK National Grid unseen since the first development of the nationally-integrated grid back in 1935.[87] The scale and speed required for a renewable energy transition in the UK renders a market-based structure for the production and distribution of energy insufficient. Between 2016-2017, renewable energy investment fell by 66% in the UK.[88] The TUC have called for the set-up of a British public energy company, similar to France's EDF and Sweden's Vattenfall, as necessary steps in the grid's electrification and decarbonization, delivering a just transition for workers and fair energy prices for UK residents.[89]

These offer only a small selection of the widespread and widely-acknowledged disaster of privatisation across the UK's public utilities. There is now a growing chorus of voices backing the renationalisation of many public services. Unsurprisingly, renationalised, revitalised and expanded public services therefore form the common core of many accounts of a 'green new deal' or a just transition.

What would happen if tourism was considered public infrastructure?

However, having seen how dependent the tourism industry is so reliant on essential public infrastructure, services and common resources, might we also suggest that the tourism industry itself – or at least significant sections of it – underwent a similar shift in ownership? *What would happen if tourism was considered public infrastructure?*

The following section thinks through the question of tourism as public infrastructure as a serious possibility, suggesting a range of policy areas in which public ownership and management of resources and services essential to the tourism industry could help to redirect tourism from its current status as a serious environmental and social harm, towards a more sustainable and just future. What might be achieved should tourism be considered as public infrastructure, reimagined along the lines of genuine sustainability?

87 National Grid (2023). *The history of energy in the UK*. Available at: https://www.nationalgrid.com/stories/energy-explained/history-of-energy-UK.

88 European Public Service Union, 2019.

89 Minio-Paluello, M. and Markova, A. (2022). *Public ownership of clean power: lower bills, climate action, decent jobs*. TUC. Available at: https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/public-ownership-clean-power-lower-bills-climate-action-decent-jobs.

III. A sustainable future for tourism

III. A sustainable future for tourism

Democratic control of aviation

First and foremost, to imagine tourism within a just transition, there is no more significant place to begin than with planes. There is a clear case for the aviation industry to be included as public transport infrastructure along with railway and bus services, especially as developing a genuinely 'sustainable' aviation industry may require much more structural intervention, which calls for more democratic oversight. Aviation is the most carbon-intensive form of transportation and transportation more broadly is the highest proportion of tourism emissions. A publicly-owned aviation industry within a nationalised, integrated transport system in the UK has the potential to decarbonise at the scale and pace necessary to meet climate targets, and help improve the accessibility of long and short-haul travel.

At present, the aviation industry has not made meaningful progress towards decarbonisation, relying on future Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) and carbon credit schemes under the guise of 'Sustainable Aviation Fuel'.[90] Moreover, transport in the UK, particularly aviation, suffers from similar social problems as the tourism sector more broadly, including worsening working conditions from outsourcing, subcontracting and low pay as a result of deregulation and liberalisation of the industry.[91] For example, P&O ferries, a private company that operates ferries across the English Channel, notoriously laid off 800 workers, some over video call, at the beginning of the pandemic, later replacing some with agency staff.[92]

A publicly-owned aviation industry within a nationalised, integrated transport system in the UK has the potential to decarbonise at the scale and pace necessary to meet climate targets, and help improve the accessibility of long and short-haul travel.

Considering aviation as public infrastructure is not a far stretch. In 2016, 57% of 395 airlines worldwide were already fully or partially state-owned. Coming out of the Covid-19 pandemic, the aviation industry received substantial financial help from state-governments around the world as a provider of essential infrastructure. This support came in a variety of complex and hybrid forms, including state-backed loans, equity acquisitions and wage subsidies. The UK Government issued several state-backed loans to UK

90 Latif, T. (2023). *Aviation Democracy: The case for public ownership of the aviation sector to protect jobs and protect the planet*. PCS. Available at: https://safe-landing.org/public-ownership/.

91 Chapman, A. (2023). *Losing Altitude: The Economics of Air Transport in Great Britain*. New Economics Foundation. Available at: https://neweconomics.org/2023/07/losing-altitude.

92 Campbell, M. (2022). P&O Ferries seems to have 'broken the law' by sacking 800 workers, says UK PM Boris Johnson. *Euronews*. Available at: https://www.euronews.com/travel/2022/03/17/p-o-suspends-all-ferries-amid-rumours-it-is-sacking-uk-employees.

airlines. EasyJet received €690 million, then later €1.6 billion; Ryanair received £600 million; Wizz Air £300 million and IAG-British Airways £343 million, then later £2 billion.[93] Alongside this, the UK Government issued wage subsidies, which included 55,000 aviation workers on the UK's Covid-19 Job Retention Scheme at 80% pay.[94] Outside of Covid-19 support, the aviation industry in the UK also receives significant subsidies from the UK Government, like a VAT exemption on aviation fuel that is only partially substituted by the UK's Air Passenger Duty.[95]

A publicly-owned aviation industry in the UK would also provide key democratic oversight on the future of aviation, which remains a disputed topic. There is some disagreement among trade unions on the possibilities of future carbon-free technologies like hydrogen and battery-powered aeroplanes. The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) makes the case for public ownership to divest the necessary and significant funds to develop and transition the industry to these low-carbon technologies.[96] On the other hand, PCS in the UK have recommended that a public aviation industry will involve a democratic 'managing down' with much less optimism on these speculative technologies. PCS makes the case that this will involve a fair transition for aviation workers into a publicly-integrated transport system in the UK, retaining a much smaller, public aviation sector for emergency transport and offshore wind maintenance.[97] Either way, regardless of one's judgement on the possibility and short-term feasibility of low-carbon aviation, public ownership appears essential to ensure the forms of democratic oversight necessary for any meaningful and genuine transition to a more sustainable future in the industry.

Short-haul travel

A transition away from aviation for domestic and short-haul travel in the present is nevertheless achievable without overdependence on the development of hydrogen technology in the future. Other, readily-available modes of transport like trains and battery-powered ferries are much more sustainable than flying. The majority of travel for tourism across the UK border originates from, or travels to, Europe. The already-existing Channel Tunnel and the current construction of electrified passenger ferries, sufficient for short-haul crossings, provide a vision of international travel to and from Europe that is not much different from now.[98]

A publicly-owned Eurostar Channel Tunnel train operator would provide the same low-carbon service between London, Paris, Amsterdam and Brussels, but would be more affordable and good-quality working conditions for staff could be

93 Lee, J.W. (2021). Government Bailouts of Airlines in the COVID-19 Crisis: Improving Transparency in International Air Transport. *Journal of International Economic Law*, (24).

94 Shapps, G. (2020). *Beyond the crisis*. UK Government. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/beyond-the-crisis-speech-to-the-aviation-industry.

95 Gössling, S., Fichert, F. and Forsyth, P. (2017). Subsidies in Aviation. *Sustainability*, 9(8).

96 International Transport Workers' Union (2022). *A Zero-Carbon Future for the Aviation Sector*. Available at: https://www.itfglobal.org/en/resources/zero-carbon-future-aviation-sector.

97 Latif, 2023.

98 DNV (2023). Decarbonizing ferries: Technological innovation and electrification. *Maritime Impacts.* Available at: https://www.dnv.com/expert-story/maritime-impact/showcasing-innovations-in-the-ferry-industry.html.

guaranteed. Likewise, a fleet of publicly-owned electric passenger ferries across the Channel could provide a similar service, but would also need to be properly integrated into a much wider network of public transportation, most likely trains, on either side of the crossing to reduce the necessity of cars.

Likewise, a fleet of publicly-owned electric passenger ferries across the Channel could provide a similar service, but would also need to be properly integrated into a much wider network of public transportation, most likely trains, on either side of the crossing to reduce the necessity of cars.

The EU's extensive rail network is a laudable achievement and poses exciting opportunities for the future of travel across Europe. Commercial flights produce twenty times more emissions than long-distance trains,[99] and a study in Germany concluded that two-thirds of the country's domestic flights (around 200,000 flights) could be replaced by existing train routes that take less than 4 hours. While high-speed rail may undercut some of emissions-savings as speed is more energy-intensive,[100] the recent revival of night-trains could make longer travel journeys comfortable without taking up too much holiday-time and do not require the construction of expensive, high-speed lines.[101] A study by Back on Track, for instance, calculated that 332 million passengers fly across routes that could be possible by train, representing just under a third of all air passenger departures in Europe.[102] Further, the campaign Stay Grounded have posited that more time is saved by increasing the ease and availability of connecting trains, rather than simply increasing train speed, suggesting that a much more integrated transport system is more important.[103]

There are a few sleeper train services that currently operate out of London to Scotland, Cornwall and the French Alps.[104] In Europe, start-up companies like the Belgian-Dutch cooperative European Sleeper aims to connect Brussels, Amsterdam, Berlin and Prague with a night-train.[105] Most of these services currently operate as luxury experiences, unaffordable to most and offer limited capacity, but could be made accessible as publicly-owned infrastructure, becoming the new norm for tourism travel across Europe.

99 Euronews Travel, 2022.

100 Haßler, A., Dwarkasing, C., Reckmann, E., Sekulova, F., Schneider, F., Iniesta-Arandia, I., Edwards, L., Machler, L., Schmelzer, M., Grebenjak, M., Heuwieser, M., Blázquez Sánchez, N., Bridger, R. and Mingorría, S. (2019). ***Degrowth of Aviation: Reducing Air Travel in a Just Way***. Stay Grounded. Available at: https://stay-grounded.org/report-degrowth-of-aviation/.

101 Euronews Travel, 2022.

102 Oui au train de nuit (2021). Half of the air passengers will benefit from night trains, if Europe invests. ***Back on Track***. Available at: https://back-on-track.eu/reports-and-studies-on-night-trains/.

103 Haßler et al., 2019.

104 Trainline (2023). ***Sleeper Trains in the UK***. Trainline. Available at: https://www.thetrainline.com/trains/great-britain/sleeper-trains.

105 Euronews Travel, 2022.

Connecting high-density cities is important, but there is also a critical need to integrate these connections with more local and regional rail networks to rural regions in the UK. 42% of the UK's prior rail network (13,000km out of 31,000km of railway lines) and almost 60% of stations (3,700 out of 6,400) were decommissioned and closed following reforms made between 1950 and 1970. The causes of these massive cuts include the private sector's expansion of the network and 'railway mania' in the 19th century before the UK's railways were nationalised in 1948, resulting in an inefficient network and often redundant connections, which was taken further by Margaret Thatcher's construction of the UK's motorway system in the same period,[106] ensuring the UK's future dependence on cars.

The development of a much more expansive rail network and bus services within the UK would be possible under public ownership. The expansion would be planned and democratically decided based on need, rather than the speculative and inefficient expansions of the private industry in the 19th century. A more extensive network is likely to promote domestic tourism, improve accessibility for more rural areas and help UK residents transition to low-carbon transportation. Moreover, the transition from aviation to other forms of transportation in a publicly-integrated network could support a fair transition for aviation workers with more secure, higher paying employment.

In addition, there is an opportunity to pair a sustainable transition in transportation and tourism with growing calls for a shorter working week, or the possibility of a higher annual leave entitlement in the UK.

For the summer of 2022, Germany launched a €9 regional ticket for trains, buses and trams as a one-off stimulus to encourage German residents to travel domestically.[107] 60 million tickets were sold and air quality improved in city centres,[108] but the subsidy was only possible because of Germany's already expansive and majority state-owned network. An equivalent subsidy to encourage the uptake of public transportation in the UK would need to follow significant investment and expansion of the network.

In addition, there is an opportunity to pair a sustainable transition in transportation and tourism with growing calls for a shorter working week, or the possibility of a higher annual leave entitlement in the UK. Except for short-distance travel in city centres, or across busy commuter routes, sustainable transport is likely to be slower than cars and aviation. Gaining public support for this could involve the promise of more leisure time overall to offset potential lost travel time.

106 Gibbons, S., Heblich, S. and Pinchbeck, T. (2018) *The spatial impacts of a massive rail disinvestment program: the Beeching Axe.* Centre for Economic Performance. Available at: https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/91684/.

107 Buckley, J. (2022b). You can get unlimited summer travel for $9.50 a month in this European country. *CNN*. Available at: https://edition.cnn.com/travel/article/germany-9-euro-travel-ticket/index.html.

108 Buckley, J. (2022). Germany's railways offered a month of unlimited rides for $9. Here's what happened. *CNN*. Available at: https://edition.cnn.com/travel/article/germany-9-euro-ticket-ending/index.html.

Electric cars. Electric cars have been long hailed as a major solution for sustainable transport. A key tenet of the UK Government's plan for decarbonising transport is supporting the roll-out of electric vehicles (EVs).[109] This includes banning the sale of petrol and diesel cars by 2030, now pushed back to 2035; constructing 300,000 charge-points by 2030; providing subsidies for electric vans and providing £2 billion government investment.[110]

A future of sustainable transport in the UK based on the purchase of private electric vehicles, however, is likely to increase inequality at home and abroad. Similar to the UK Government's support during the Covid-19 pandemic, government aid and investment is expected to be mainly directed at private industry with only limited support to help UK residents. Moreover, EVs do not address existing problems of mobility in the UK like a lack of access in rural and deprived areas, and congestion in cities. EVs could also be considered another burden-shifting mechanism. While EVs would be net-zero within the UK, the environmental and social impacts of mining abroad are serious, including human rights violations and the appropriation of indigenous land.[111]

Electrified and battery-powered public transportation like railways, buses or passenger ferries do not face these problems to the same extent because the amount of mining materials required is much lower. This is because public transport is in constant use and transports many more passengers at one time, while private passenger vehicles sit idle for the majority of the time. Public transportation also alleviates problems of congestion when services are frequent, accessible and integrated with other modes of transport.

109 Department for Transport (2021). *Decarbonising transport: a better, greener Britain*. UK Government. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transport-decarbonisation-plan.

110 Department for Transport and Harper, M. (2023). *Government sets out path to zero emission vehicles by 2035*. UK Government. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-sets-out-path-to-zero-emission-vehicles-by-2035.

111 Riofrancos, T., Kendall, A., Dayemo, K.K., Haugen, M., McDonald, K., Hassan, B., Slattery, M. and Lillehei, X. (2023). *Achieving Zero Emissions with More Mobility and Less Mining*. Climate and Community Project. Available at: https://www.climateandcommunity.org/post/press-release-more-mobility-less-mining.

Long-haul travel

Long-haul, or inter-ocean travel, presents much more significant problems for sustainability and accessibility. At present, the aviation and shipping industries are in their nascent stages of developing and introducing low-carbon technologies for long-haul transport.[112] Even under public ownership, these industries would be starting from a similar developmental stage, which means long-haul mobility within necessary carbon budgets would still be a significant challenge. This poses problems for the immediate necessity of a sustainable transition in the midst of an unfolding, worsening climate crisis.

Battery-powered passenger ships for short-haul crossings are already in construction, but this is still to be translated into mass transportation across the Atlantic or Pacific Oceans, for example. This is largely because non-renewable fuels are much more energy dense, which means that hydrogen and battery-powered ships or planes for long distances would be much heavier than would be feasible for travel.[113]

Current research on the decarbonisation of aviation relies on the future of hydrogen as a renewable energy source, but mainly depends on CCS, biofuels and efficiency measures.[114] This is why a change in ownership is important for the aviation and transport industries to accelerate the research into these technologies as coordinated intervention at the national level is much more efficient than individual enterprises in competition. For example, under current ownership models, promises of hydrogen technology from the private energy sector have been deployed to simply prolong the UK's reliance on natural gas, rather than accelerate a renewable energy transition.[115]

112 Esqué, A., Mitchell, A., Rastogi, K. and Riedel, R. (2022). Decarbonizing the aviation sector: Making net zero aviation possible. *McKinsey & Company*. Available at: https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/aerospace-and-defense/our-insights/decarbonizing-the-aviation-sector-making-net-zero-aviation-possible#/.

113 Kamal, R. and Chang, A. (2022). Here's why it's so hard to electrify shipping and aviation. *The Guardian*. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/environment/ng-interactive/2021/nov/11/climate-fuel-gasoline-petrol-ships-planes.

114 Esqué, Mitchell, Rastogi and Riedel, 2022.

115 Harrabin, R. (2021). Ignore hype over hydrogen heating, government told. *BBC News*. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-57103298.

Pooling global resources on low-carbon technologies. Countries of the Global North, including the UK, are historically the biggest emitters and contributors to the climate crisis as a result of long colonial legacies that still exist to this day. These countries have many more resources than most countries to lead coordinated development in sustainable and accessible inter-ocean transportation. The UK is third in the world for the size of its aviation network behind the USA and China, providing 1.1 million jobs and adding £66 billion to the UK economy.[116] Considering that many international tourists that visit the UK are from the USA and China, the UK stands to benefit by coordinating and pooling resources with these countries in developing a future of aviation. To aid a worldwide transition, these technologies would need to be shared and made publicly available to reduce the fiscal burden on countries who have contributed the least to the climate crisis.[117]

Despite this, hydrogen and battery-operated technologies are much easier to implement for water-based transportation than air.[118] Some strides have already been made in the shipping sector with new ships that are powered by wind propulsion,[119] and some tentative advancements have been made with partially hydrogen-powered cruise ships.[120]

Democratic, public development of these technologies would put them in service of the common good, rather than for profit, with more transparency over their impacts and effectiveness. This will help to ensure that the future of aviation, whether that is a transition away to other modes of transport or decarbonisation of the sector, is not based on future, speculative technologies.[121] In addition, these technologies could be much more easily paired and complemented with social policies, surrounding working time reduction, for example, under democratic development.

116 Latif, 2023.

117 International Transport Workers' Union, 2022.

118 Haßler et al., 2019.

119 Oceanbird (2020). Introducing Oceanbird. *Oceanbird*. Available at: https://www.theoceanbird.com/blog/introducing-oceanbird/.

120 Viking Cruises (2022). Viking Takes Delivery of Newest Ship. *Viking Cruises*. Available at: https://www.vikingcruises.co.uk/press/press-releases/2022-11-10-viking-takes-delivery-of-newest-ocean-ship.html.

121 International Transport Workers' Union, 2022.

Changing demand: the necessity of a social programme

Regardless of the speed and feasibility of technological changes required to make low carbon transport possible, in a more sustainable future long-haul travel is likely to be slower with more emphasis on longer, more infrequent trips.[122] We cannot avoid changing 'demand' as well as decarbonising 'supply': slower, less distant, less frequent (overall) travel will have to be a part of a just transition.

We cannot avoid changing 'demand' as well as decarbonising 'supply': slower, less distant, less frequent (overall) travel will have to be a part of a just transition.

However, the status quo of cheap, quick short haul flights is, to a significant extent, the product of the grossly unequal, time-poor society in which we live. People's choices and preferences are largely determined by their material and social conditions and the wider tourism, hospitality and transport industries. Tourism in a just transition is not just about how to decarbonise these sectors, but also how social policies in the UK that currently support a very limited socially and environmentally unsustainable vision of mobility and leisure can be transformed.

The policies we list below are far from definitive. However, they are raised to show how shifts towards a more sustainable tourism sector cannot be taken apart from wider transformations in society. While some of these – such as reductions in working time or greater redistribution – may on the one hand look as though they may raise issues of increased 'demand' for unsustainable forms of tourism, we suggest how, taken together as a holistic package, they can instead form the basis for a greener, more equitable future. Many will be recognisable as established components of others' accounts of a just, green transition. We therefore focus less on more 'general' arguments in their favour, so much as their impact on *tourism* within this alternative future.

Reducing working time would also, in principle, help to make 'slower' forms of transportation more attractive, especially should these be rendered more comfortable and affordable under the direction of public ownership.

Reduced working time (for no loss in pay) – whether in the form of a shorter working week, more bank holidays, a shorter working day, or more annual leave entitlements and sabbatical allowances – would offer the potential for many to explore different types of leisure outside of work, justified as 'leisure for leisure's sake'.[123] While this may lead to greater demand for tourism, as many look to make use of new found time away from work, reducing working time would also, in principle, help to make 'slower' forms of transportation more attractive, especially should these be rendered more comfortable and affordable under the direction of public ownership. The journey would become part of the trip without sacrificing precious holiday time and working patterns would better coincide with the new pace and organisation of a sustainable world.

122 Haßler et al., 2019.

123 Schor, J.B. (1993). *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure*. BasicBooks, p.73.

Greater redistribution of wealth can also be implemented in a number of different ways. Renewed redistribution can take the form of a universal basic income, climate reparations or a Global Climate Fund,[124] funded through taxation and shifting industries away from private ownership. Greater wealth equality, at the global and domestic level, is also likely to result in many more people having much more substantial amounts of leisure time and participating in more leisure activities.

Newfound economic security for people in middle-income brackets could mean, however, moving away from the work-spend cycle, where people are less likely to compensate overworking with more intense, high-carbon spending habits and leisure activities to recuperate.[125] The highest income brackets are overwhelmingly culpable for emissions through their consumption. The richest 10% account for 50% of carbon emissions, emitting 24 tonnes of C02 every year which is 8.5 times over the limit to stay within 1.5°C by 2030.[126]

The wealthiest are also largely responsible for emissions as shareholders and owners of industry. While the majority of tourism businesses are small and medium-sized enterprises (MNCs), the sector is increasingly controlled by a small minority of corporate tourism operators, hospitality groups and transport monopolies that operate for profit. Changes in ownership away from private business for these major players towards more democratic ownership - at the appropriate community, municipal or national level - will put these enterprises in service of the public and common good, making them much more amenable and accountable to the demands of decarbonisation and equity.

These shifts in ownership could be paired alongside a robust taxation scheme as part of a sustainable, just transition. A study by Oxfam in 2023 calculated that US$9 trillion could be collected from the world's wealthiest individuals and businesses through a wealth tax, high-income tax and windfall corporate profits tax that could be redistributed and help fund the transition.[127]

A Universal Basic Income (UBI) is an example of a redistributive policy with the potential to almost eradicate poverty. A UBI is a universal, unconditional, regular cash payment to individuals that provides a guaranteed income floor and is usually proposed to be implemented at the national level. There are different models of a UBI, ranging from supplementary to living wage basic incomes that would operate alongside the UK's current welfare system, Universal Credit. A UBI is unconditional and universal, rather than means-tested.[128]

124 Táíwò O.O. (2022). *Reconsidering Reparations*. Oxford University Press.

125 Schor, 1993.

126 Oxfam (2023). *Climate Equality: A planet for the 99%*. Oxfam. Available at: https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/climate-equality-planet-99.

127 Oxfam, 2023.

128 Basic Income Conversation (2020). *About Basic Income Conversation*. Basic Income Conversation. Available at: https://www.basicincomeconversation.org/about.

A nationwide sustainable and just transition is likely to involve job transitions for potentially millions of UK workers. Even in the transport and energy sectors, UK workers will potentially shift from the private oil, gas and aviation industries to publicly-owned, low-carbon and renewable energy and transportation sectors. As already mentioned, a future of the UK that involves more leisure time is likely to lead to more work in a municipally-owned tourism sector. These major shifts in people's employment will require large-scale coordination, planning and different scales of democratic deliberation which calls for the implementation of social safety nets like a UBI to protect workers. Even after a transition period to net-zero, a UBI will continue to protect workers in more seasonal work and support a range of employment, holiday and leisure patterns.

Funding for a UBI is a key question that depends on the type or model of basic income. A UBI has the potential to have a high cost, but this is not an insurmountable problem as funding for a UBI scheme involves calculating the *net cost*. For example, implementing a UBI will result in the elimination of redundant forms of financial support (though this does not apply to existing welfare support for people with additional needs). Moreover, basic income payments can be taxed by income rate, allowing people on lower incomes to keep more of each payment. A UBI has many knock-on effects like reduced costs for the NHS by almost eliminating poverty and economic insecurity. Lastly, a UBI for a sustainable, just transition can be funded through taxation schemes for a worldwide, climate transition, as outlined above.[129]

129 Frayne, D. and Goodman, C. (2023). ***A beginner's guide to basic income costings***. Basic Income Conversation. Available at: https://www.basicincomeconversation.org/resources.

Universal Basic Income for Cornwall. While a UBI is likely to be best implemented at the national level, a study by Autonomy shows the potential widespread benefits of implementing a UBI for Cornwall, England. Cornwall has a higher composition of businesses in agriculture, tourism and hospitality compared to the rest of the UK. 20% of jobs in the region are in the tourism sector. Work in both tourism and agriculture is highly seasonal, often precarious and low-paying.

A UBI for tourism destinations like Cornwall has the potential to benefit tourism workers and support a transition to a sustainable, municipally-owned tourism sector in the UK. In 2019, the national hourly wage was £15.17, whereas Cornish workers receive £11.85 an hour. During the pandemic, 36% of children were eating food from foodbanks. Nearly, 30,000 homes – just over 11% of all households – in Cornwall live in fuel poverty.

Currently, there is a trade-off between economic security and seasonal work as a result of how social policies in the UK are structured to support and direct people towards the 9-5, 5-day working week norm. Despite this, a survey by YouGov found that only 6% of workers in the UK work 9-5.[130] A UBI for tourism workers in Cornwall could raise living standards and reduce job uncertainty in the winter seasons. A living wage basic income would nearly eradicate poverty and massively reduce inequality. The role of a UBI in a green transition to reduce economic risk has already been raised by Cornwall Green Party councillor, Tamsyn Widdon, in 2021.[131]

130 YouGov (2018). *Over nine in ten not working the usual 9-5 week*. YouGov UK. Available at: https://yougov.co.uk/economy/articles/21434-over-nine-ten-not-working-usual-9-5-week.

131 Dinata et al., 2022.

Demilitarisation of borders is similarly important for a social programme that supports tourism as a human right**.** A study in 2019 found that potentially 1-3 billion people could be displaced as a result of global warming by 2070.[132] This means that a sustainable, just transition will also involve countries of the Global North accommodating a fair share of the world's climate refugees and asylum seekers. This is not just an international problem, but domestic as well. A third of England's coastline will come under pressure from sea levels rising, putting 200,000 properties at risk, causing domestic displacement.[133]

The problem is not just with involuntary, permanent migration, but even a temporary visit to the UK for leisure is highly restricted because of difficult visa processes that effectively control the mobility of the global majority in favour of residents and citizens in the Global North.[134]

Both voluntary mobility for leisure and involuntary mobility by climate refugees are likely to play a significant role in a sustainable, just transition in the UK. Without a demilitarisation of the UK's borders, the UK – as a neocolonial economic power – will only contribute and play a pivotal role in an emerging global 'climate apartheid'.[135] The UK is already headed in this direction with the 2023 Illegal Migration Act which removes people's right to seek refugee protection in the UK, threatening human rights and breaching the UN Refugee Convention.[136]

An international tourism workers' movement. The question and role of borders in a sustainable, just transition also extends to the workers' movement involved in such a transition for tourism. As already mentioned, the hospitality and tourism industries employ 8% of the UK workforce. The majority of these workers have customer-facing, or elementary positions, in a pub, restaurant or hotel. However, many of the remaining employees are desk-basked, working in travel agencies or event management.[137] The people employed in travel agencies, for example, are a relatively small number, but have a unique position in transitioning the UK away from the private travel industry's more predatory and exploitative practices abroad, whilst ensuring a fair transition to the newly-created jobs in the UK's municipally-owned tourism.

132 Xu, C., Kohler, T.A., Lenton, T.M., Svenning, J.-C. and Scheffer, M. (2020). Future of the human climate niche. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 117(21).

133 Fisher, J. (2022). Climate change: Rising sea levels threaten 200,000 England properties. *BBC News*. 15 Jun. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-61795783.

134 Neumayer, E. (2006). Unequal access to foreign spaces: how states use visa restrictions to regulate mobility in a globalized world. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 31(1), pp.72–84.

135 United Nations (2019). World faces 'climate apartheid' risk, 120 more million in poverty. *UN News.* Available at: https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/06/1041261.

136 Friends of the Earth (2024). What's the link between climate, migration and refugees? *Friends of the Earth.* Available at: https://friendsoftheearth.uk/system-change/whats-link-between-climate-migration-and-refugees.

137 Economic Insight, 2019.

An international tourism workers' movement could pressurise the removal of UK-based tourism operators from tourist destinations abroad, introducing windfall taxes on their way out. This would aid the self-determination of tourist destinations abroad whilst bargaining for the same democratic ownership of tourism in the UK.

Decoupling by democratic ownership

The broader 'social' aspects of a just transition may on the one hand appear to pose a problem of *increased demand*. With greater leisure time and more widely spread spending power, the desire to travel is likely to be greater – this seems hard to dispute. However, it would be misguided to see these as likely to lead directly to the forms of unsustainable, harmful tourism with which we are familiar.

As already noted, efficiency measures and technological innovations have proven futile methods of separating carbon emissions and overall environmental impact from the tourism sector. For tourism, reducing demand as a method of reducing emissions also seems unlikely given how inaccessible tourism currently is and the importance of increased mobility and leisure for a socially just and desirable future. Instead, this report proposes a decoupling of emissions in the tourism sector through democratic and municipal ownership.

Local and municipal tourism

At present, the UK Government's tourism strategy sets a limited effective goal – higher visitor numbers every year – rather than a more holistic approach to aid the management of the UK's tourism hotspots. If a sustainable, just transition in the UK involves higher living standards and greater wealth equality, which in turn results in more mobility, this lack of support and centralisation of authority will only lead to worsening problems of over-tourism.

While transportation beyond the local level appears readily suited to public ownership, requiring much more coordinated and large-scale intervention, the necessarily localised and place-based specificity of tourism could render top-down policies unhelpful and potentially harmful. Thinking of tourism as public infrastructure, at a more local level, involves thinking beyond nationalisation to other types of public ownership like municipal and common ownership. This provides the means for local recuperation and taxation of the surplus produced from tourism activities and the authority for local residents and tourism workers to make decisions on the management of tourism in their locality.[138]

138 Higgins-Desbiolles, F. (2020). Socialising tourism for social and ecological justice after COVID-19. *Tourism Geographies*, 22(3), pp.1–14.

In the past week, for instance, it has been reported that the government has blocked attempts to allow Local Authorities to establish "tourist taxes" by charging levies on hotel stays.[139] Such a tax would, however, be a sensible first step to community management of tourism. On the one hand it would enrich communities that rely on tourism. On the other hand, it would disincentivize harmful over-tourism.
Such a tax would begin to undo the heavy toll that UK Government austerity has heaped upon local councils over the last decade. Funding to local authorities has reduced by 86% between 2009 and 2019 as a result of cuts from central government grants, further concentrating wealth and power in London and South East England.[140] This means that local councils rely on generating income from council tax and business rates, which are dependent on the overall wealth of the regional economy.

Therefore, any overhaul toward municipal and democratic management of tourism will involve massive changes in the power and authority of local councils to improve living standards and reduce wealth inequality. This will not be accomplished by simply reversing austerity policies by reinstating central government grants to local authorities, though this is necessary, but will involve a wholesale devolution of power from central government to municipal and regional authorities in the UK.

Managing common land and resources

The UK does not principally have a problem with *too many* tourists, but rather their overconcentration in a few overcrowded hotspots. The recent revival of the UK seaside holiday during Covid-19 and cost-of-living crisis has exacerbated this problem. The summer of 2024 is predicted to see similar trends, with Blackpool, England more popular than Benidorm, Spain for hotel bookings this year. The suggested reason is increases in airfare prices, which have risen 30% since pre-pandemic.[141]

UK seaside holidays were some of the first mass tourist destinations for the middle and working classes during the Victorian period after rising living standards, higher wages and more time off work resulted in UK residents catching trains to the nearest seaside town for a holiday.[142] With the rise of budget airlines, UK seaside holidays were on the decline until the Covid-19 pandemic, and many of these historic destinations – despite a recent uptick in popularity following Covid – have become some of the most deprived in England, including Blackpool, Great

139 Ellison, A. (2025). Angela Rayner blocked from allowing councils to tax tourists. *The Times*. Available at: https://www.thetimes.com/article/f157f244-9454-4fa4-87f4-7a166efe9240

140 Johns, M. (2020). *10 Years of Austerity: Eroding Resilience in the North*. Institute for Public Policy Research.

141 PA Media (2023). Blackpool beats Benidorm as soaring air fares keep UK holidaymakers at home. *The Guardian*. 13 Nov. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/business/2023/nov/12/blackpool-beats-benidorm-as-soaring-air-fares-keep-uk-holidaymakers-at-home

142 Fletcher, R. (2011). Sustaining Tourism, Sustaining Capitalism? The Tourism Industry's Role in Global Capitalist Expansion. *Tourism Geographies*, 13(3), pp.443–461.

Yarmouth, Torbay, East Lindsey and Tendring.[143] A change in ownership of the private tourism industry to municipal authorities could result in the profits of this post-pandemic, domestic tourism revival being captured and distributed within local communities, through the creation of new social goods. As with the case of Cornwall, a booming tourism industry in its current form does not necessarily trickle down to local residents and tourism workers.

Municipal ownership of tourism could be achieved along a few lines of strategy. The first is the nationalisation of basic services like energy and water paired with a return to common land ownership. A democratic and common ownership of land and resources, rather than privatisation, is the benchmark of any just, sustainable transition. The climate crisis is borne out of an economic system that exploits the natural environment and people for endless profit, rather than for social and environmental well-being.

Currently, people in England — tourists and residents alike — have no access to 92% of the countryside and 97% of rivers, even though access to nature has proven essential for well-being, demonstrated during the Covid-19 lockdowns.[144] The Right to Roam Campaign based in England is advocating for the common law right to roam the English countryside, regardless of whether the land is public or private. Less than 1% of the population – 25,000 landowners – own half of England.[145] Common ownership of land would instill this right to access and enjoy the English countryside, but would also legislate the right for democratic deliberation over its management, including for tourism activities. Tourism for collective well-being, rather than for profit, involves common access to land and resources.

For tourism, a transfer of power and authority to local councils and common ownership of land and resources could help to solve a number of problems in the tourism industry. Firstly, municipally-owned tourism could potentially better distribute tourists. In the case of seaside destinations, local authorities could coordinate and democratically manage where there are pockets of over-tourism and distribute tourism more evenly along the UK coastline, reducing the burden on overcrowded destinations through collective spatial planning.
Secondly, understanding tourism as public infrastructure would result in public services that would have the flexibility and capacity to account for tourism through municipal economic planning.[146]

143 Chapman, 2023.

144 Right to Roam (2022). *The Right to Roam is the Right to Reconnect*. Right to Roam. Available at: https://www.righttoroam.org.uk/.

145 Shrubsole, G. (2019). *Who owns England? How We Lost Our Green and Pleasant Land, and How to Take it Back*.

146 Epler Wood, M., Milstein, M. and Ahamed-Broadhurst, K. (2019). *Destinations at Risk: The Invisible Burden of Tourism*. The Travel Foundation. Available at: https://www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk/invisible-burden/.

Thirdly, democratic and local ownership would better balance the needs of local residents with tourists, helping to ensure that local people have access to wild spaces and outdoor activities that are often only accessible to tourists. This would also include the creation and construction of common spaces available for both tourists and residents. A significant contribution to over-tourism is a lack of common space for people to be leisurely and spend time without spending money. The tourism industry currently funnels more affluent tourists to spend money on activities that residents typically can't afford, whilst flooding the small number of common spaces that are still available, causing overcrowding for residents. Common land ownership could massively expand the number of common spaces available, increasing the capacity for tourists and residents alike.

Reclaiming housing as a public good

The common ownership of land and nationalisation of resources like energy and water, alongside greater devolution to local councils in the UK, are central components of a just, sustainable transition for municipal tourism. While comprehensive examination of all the necessary aspects of the future of tourism is beyond the scope of this report, another component of municipal tourism that is important is housing.

Reclaiming housing as a public good is central for the livelihoods, well-being and economic security of local residents, but a similar approach for a municipally-owned tourism industry raises possibilities for directly capturing and redistributing the surplus of tourism spending and facilitating greater authority for residents over local economic planning.

Housing as a decommodified, public good is a prominent feature of Green New Deal and just transition programs.[147] Housing has become increasingly unaffordable, outpacing wage increases. The UK also has some of the oldest housing stock in Europe, which makes them energy inefficient. 17% of energy consumption in the UK is from housing, which raises the importance of retrofitting programs to make UK homes less energy intensive whilst reducing fuel poverty.[148]

The distribution and allocation of housing in the UK is largely reliant on the market. UK Government support for housing, since the 1980s, has focused on individual home ownership. Before this, the UK had a flourishing social housing program. In the 35 years after World War II, 126,000 social homes were built a year on average. In contrast, between 2021 and 2022, 7,528 new social homes were built, while 1.1 million people are still on wait-lists. At the same time, social housing continues to be sold-off at a quicker pace than new social housing is built.[149]

147 Ajl, M. (2021). *A People's Green New Deal*. Pluto Press.

148 Labour for a Green New Deal, 2019.

149 Shelter (2023). *The story of social housing*. Shelter. Available at: https://england.shelter.org.uk/support_us/campaigns/story_of_social_housing.

Common land ownership and democratic municipal economic planning are important components of decommodified social housing for local residents in a just transition. However, thinking of tourists as temporary visitors also raises the question of housing and accommodation for tourism. Where will tourists sleep? How can the profits and surplus from these overnight visitors be directly captured and redistributed in the local community? Reclaiming housing as a public good is central for the livelihoods, well-being and economic security of local residents, but a similar approach for a municipally-owned tourism industry raises possibilities for directly capturing and redistributing the surplus of tourism spending and facilitating greater authority for residents over local economic planning.

London's housing crisis. London is a great example of how restricted housing becomes under market conditions. London has 30,000 properties that are sitting vacant.[150] This is because, under market conditions, housing becomes an investment opportunity, rather than a place of residence. In 2019, just under 81,000 properties were listed on Airbnb,[151] and there were 159,000 hotel rooms in London.[152] At the same time, 250,000 Londoners in 2021 were waiting for social housing.[153]

Central to tackling the social unsustainability of tourism and housing in the UK is its decommodification and redistribution, making sure that local residents have access to quality, low-carbon and affordable housing.

150 Toms, A. (2023). *Full list of empty houses in every London borough worth more than £20 billion*. My London. Available at: https://www.mylondon.news/news/property/full-list-empty-houses-every-26972944.

151 Temperton, J. (2020). *Airbnb has devoured London – and here's the data that proves it*. Wired UK. Available at: https://www.wired.co.uk/article/airbnb-london-short-term-rentals.

152 London & Partners (2019). *London hotel industry set for record year in 2020*. London & Partners. Available at: https://media.londonandpartners.com/news/london-hotel-industry-set-for-record-year-in-2020.

153 Mellor, J. (2021). *'London epicentre of housing crisis' as 250,000 on council waiting list*. The London Economic. Available at: https://www.thelondoneconomic.com/news/london-epicentre-of-housing-crisis-as-250000-on-council-waiting-list-295425/.

Conclusion: The holiday as public luxury

Conclusion: The holiday as public luxury

As this report has described, the existing national and international tourism industries contribute disproportionately to global carbon emissions and poor labour standards – an unsustainable and profoundly unfair arrangement.

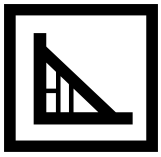
Critical accounts of tourism frequently capture the economically, socially and ecologically extractive nature of existing practices, but generally fall short of the universal needs that underscore them. These include the need for rest, the need for time away from work, the need to be in nature, the need to access culture, the need for excitement and entertainment; universal needs to which everyone ought to be entitled, regardless of means or origin.

In the face of such common needs we have proposed building infrastructures – legal, institutional and physical – which can meet and sustain them.

The report has therefore proposed a platform which could transform tourism in the UK. These measures are designed to foster forms of tourism which are locally and nationally democratic, evenly accessible and most of all ecologically sustainable – in other words, ones which better meet our needs than the existing system.

The right to paid holiday was a key demand of 20th century labour movements – marked in the UK by the introduction of the Holidays with Pay Act in 1938, which for the first time guaranteed paid holiday to workers. Such gains represent a universal aspiration for leisure, rest and recuperation – for time away from work – to be extended to everyone, regardless of means. But the British holiday has since become dominated by the logic of personal luxury: heavily commodified, unequally enjoyed and highly extractive – exhausting in many senses of the term.

Against this, we can place the prospect of public luxury: the holiday as a universal right, enjoyed freely (without the stress of work, or of going unpaid) and managed democratically (not bought by privileged few).



Autonomy
Institute

Published 2025 by:
© The Autonomy Institute

The Autonomy Institute
Rowhill Road
London
E5 8EB