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Understanding the behaviour of hypermobile tourists

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Présentation longue

<p>Contact : Christophe Gay </p> <h1>The research</h1>
The research was conducted by a team of researchers from the University of Angers, supported by a researcher from the University of Savoie Mont Blanc, under the direction of Philippe Violier. The first step was a quantitative component conducted using data from the Tourism Demand Survey (SDT, Suivi de la Demande Touristique) conducted by Kantar TNS, in order to identify the profile of hypermobile tourists. In a second step, a qualitative interview survey was conducted among thirty hypermobile individuals identified in the SDT database in order to better understand their practices and then identify the degree to which they were willing to change their practices in order to reduce their carbon impact. The interviews took place in June and July 2021, during the second summer of the Covid 19 health crisis, allowing the team to study the impact on hypermobile travel practices and projects.

<h1>The results</h1> <h2>• Tourism, a necessary system to allow individuals to take a break from a society under constraints...</h2>
The team links the growth of tourism to the expansion of industrial civilization, which established strong constraints related in particular to work. In this context, introducing some non-working time to allow people to relax and engage in leisure activities became a necessary condition for maintaining these constraints, as it limits the risk of exhaustion. The need to get away from an alienating daily life implies leaving one's regular living space to go to other dedicated places, sometimes designed and arranged to promote this loosening of constraints, and implementing practices that also break with everyday life. Therefore, the researchers relied on the work by the MIT taskforce (Mobilities, Itineraries, Tourism) and defined tourism as "a system designed to enable the recreation of individuals and [...] which includes places, practices, actors, norms and values...". Thus, the researchers dismiss the idea that individuals could do without tourism.

<h2>• ... But that poses environmental and social problems</h2>
However, tourism practices are problematic, first of all because of their environmental impacts, in particular air travel and, to a lesser extent, car use. According to a 2010 study by the Ministry of Ecological Transition, tourism is responsible for 5% of global CO2 emissions. In France, tourism transport is estimated to contribute 8% of GHG emissions.[^1] As for air travel, globally, it was estimated in

2015 to contribute 11% of all transport-related GHG emissions, which is 1.5% of total emissions, but its impact is largely underestimated..[^2] While tourists are aware of environmental issues and implement virtuous practices in their daily lives, these sustainable behaviors don't translate into their tourism practices. To reduce this "cognitive dissonance" - which is well identified in the literature - tourists develop various strategies: they underestimate the situation, deflect blame onto the most serious cases, deny their own responsibility, or find reasons not to be more sustainable while on vacation (lack of money/information/options).

Secondly, tourism practices are marked by significant social inequalities. A report by the British NGO Possible, published in March 2021, indicated that in 2014, only 1 in 4 French people had taken a plane, and that only 4% of French people had taken it regularly to another European country. Globally, according to a study published in the journal Global Environmental Change in November 2020.[^3], 1% of the population caused 50% of aviation-related CO_2 emissions in 2018. The most significant impacts are therefore caused by a very small part of the population, the richest. It's these super-emitters, these hypermobile tourists, that the researchers wanted to focus on.

• Who are the hypermobile travelers and what are their tourism practices?

The hypermobile-type: the Parisian executive or independent without dependent children

They are considered hypermobile because they make at least 7 trips a year but some are much more mobile than others: in 2016, the 25% most mobile individuals made at least 16 trips.

The median age is 49 years: 25% of hypermobile travelers are under 35 and 25% are over 63.

Nearly a third of hypermobile travelers (32.4%) are without a job. 22.9% are senior managers or hold liberal professions. 20.3% belong to the intermediate and foreman professions. However, farmers (0.6%) and traders, craftsmen and entrepreneurs (3.9%) are the least represented among hypermobile travelers.

Most of them have a small household: almost 60% of hypermobile travelers are single (20%) or in relationship without any dependents (40%).

Finally, there's an overrepresentation of people from the capital, as over 1 in 3 hypermobile travelers live in the Paris region (36.7%).

Example of a hypermobile traveler's tourist practices in 2019

<h3>Cars and planes are the big winners</h3>
The qualitative interviews reveal that for their travels, hypermobile individuals prefer the most CO2-emitting modes, namely cars and planes, while trains are less used.

<h3>This choice is motivated by four types of determinants: </h3> The destination : For travel abroad, planes are the most common method. For travel within mainland France, trains do compete with cars, but almost only when the destination is a metropolitan city center, where travelling by high-speed TGV train is more competitive. Cars win when the trip is for a destination that is less easily accessible or that requires being mobile on location. Alone or with family : For family trips, people prefer taking the car, because of the cumulative cost of taking the train depending on the number of travelers, but also because of luggage, especially when bulky equipment has to be taken along (such as skis). The price : Overall, the car is considered more accessible than the train which is systematically considered too expensive. The low-cost train service by the SNCF wasn't mentioned, while low-cost flights are very frequently mentioned for air travel - it's even identified as an incentive for tourist hypermobility. Place of residence : Households, especially those without children, who live in city centers or who are well connected to high-speed train stations by public transport, use the train more. Beyond that, cars enjoy a positive image associated with practicality and greater freedom, while trains are more often associated with constraints.
<h2>• What impact has the health crisis had on their practices?</h2>
The crisis undeniably had temporary effects, including a rediscovery of France. But these changes don't seem to have consolidated over time. Planned international trips were only suspended and are being rescheduled.

Why? Because "discovery" is the main motivation for distant travel. If travel within France is mainly synonymous with sociability (visiting relatives, meeting others in a holiday home, etc.) and rest, going abroad, and therefore mainly by plane, is considered necessary to experience a real break with everyday life, to get away from it all and discover other landscapes, other cultures, etc.

<blockquote>"[The environmental impact of travel], it's true that I think about it, well, we think about it, but the desire to discover the world is stronger than that."

Julie </blockquote> <blockquote>"If I could only travel locally? Well, I'd feel disappointed. Even if France is beautiful and all, but after a while, I'd want to go a little further. It doesn't feel foreign enough to me." Juliette </blockquote> <blockquote>" … I wanted to get away last year. I didn't want to stay in France. […] I usually go abroad. So I wanted to go far away. […] I have to move, I have to go and see… Otherwise I feel like it's not a real holiday because I don't get a break from my environment." Annie</blockquote>

This is despite the fact that almost all the people interviewed in this study are sensitive to environmental issues and adopt ecological habits in their daily lives: recycling waste, composting, carpooling, using bicycles and public transport, energy and water savings, buying from local producers… But these considerations are put to the background when it comes to tourist trips, which are dominated by other motivations. For the respondents, travel is indeed a hedonic practice, a source of pleasure, a break from everyday life that's considered essential for well-being, confirming the researcher's analysis of tourism as a means of recreation in a strongly constrained lifestyle.

<blockquote>"It's really part of the lifestyle; it's a bit of a shame because I feel like I work to pay for my holidays but that's really part of the game." Annie</blockquote> The hypermobile travelers that took part in the survey aren't willing to change their practices and are even ready to pay more for their plane ticket if a tax is implemented. They also tend to try and reduce their cognitive dissonance, including blaming others or underestimating the impact of their practices, confirming the results identified in the literature.

<blockquote>"Yes, of course, we know that planes have a big carbon footprint. But, what's the alternative? […] If you want to go to a different continent, it's true that it's complicated. […] But when we go on big trips, it's once a year. There are for sure more businessmen taking the plane regularly, so there isn't a sense of guilt about it either." Isabelle</blockquote> <h2>• How to decarbonize the travel of hypermobile tourists? The Forum's proposals </h2> <h3>First, by raising awareness </h3> Public authorities could set up a carbon account allowing everyone to objectively assess the impact of their lifestyle in terms of greenhouse gases. This would allow people to measure the gap between the benefits of the everyday habits mentioned by the respondents in the study (recycling, carpooling, etc.) and the magnitude of their carbon impact from their trips by car and plane. By introducing a more

egalitarian system

Since hypermobile travelers aren't ready to give up their practices, even if maintaining them means paying more money, we could imagine the introduction of a carbon quota system giving every French person the right to emit the same amount of CO2. This system would cover travel by car or plane and would apply to everyone regardless of their financial means, making it possible to focus the effort mainly on people whose lifestyle is the most emitting and call into question tourist hypermobility. Distant travel would remain possible, but would necessarily be less frequent.

<h3>By promoting a modal shift to the train</h3>
Public authorities could also pursue a large-scale policy to make the train more attractive. Either by lowering taxes on train prices, as proposed by the Citizens' Convention for Climate, or by offering subsidies for long-distance train journeys which, unlike everyday trips, don't get any support from public authorities. We could also imagine offering a person's first train trips at a reduced price, or even for free, to allow unfamiliar users to test the train. To increase its practicality and make it more competitive with the car, rail transport should be designed in a systemic way, from home to destination, working on intermodality with other public transport, cycling, and walking. A high-speed train network as well as a night train network could be widely developed on a European scale to provide credible alternatives to flying.

Finally, we can also consider the idea of a price floor for low-cost flights, as they currently leave little room for more sustainable transport means that are necessarily more expensive, while these low-cost flights aren't yet subject to any significant tax on kerosene.

<h3>By acting on the spatial and temporal dimensions of tourism practices</h3>
Acting on travel and transport supply won't be enough if we don't fundamentally act upon the spatial and temporal dimensions of people's lifestyles.

Drastically reducing air travel could be an opportunity to invent a new organization of social rhythms, allowing people to go on leave less often but for longer periods at a time, so that they can have the opportunity to maintain distant tourism practices involving slower journeys.

Tourism could also consist in rediscovering other ways of recreation and changing scenery than by distant travel, through local tourism, relying on the resources of the territories and their inhabitants.

Finally, since tourism is seen as a necessary break in very intense lifestyles, it may be worth questioning daily rhythms and the place of work in people's lives, as this could make the need for "recreation" through distant travel less important.

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<!-- Notes -->
[^1]: Direction Générale de l'Energie et du Climat, Les stratégies nationales du tourisme et du climat, 2010. [^2]: https://theconversation.com/impact-du-transport-aerien-sur-le-climat-pourquoi-il-faut-refaire-les-calculs-116534?fbclid=IwAR39kVJ361rORJx5LoeQmLHiSjIlgC3nL_IRL9dQ3GEnrr510jLnjukW47Y [^3]: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959378020307779#t0005

Chapô

Tourism is an essential sector of the global economy and has become an integral part of our lifestyles. Yet, the explosion of tourist travel raises questions, especially in light of current environmental issues. The health crisis hasn't managed to bring about a durable change in practices; indeed, after two disrupted summer seasons, travel has picked up again. Among holidaymakers, there are some who are known as hypermobile tourists. The Mobile Lives Forum wanted to understand who they are, what their mobility practices are, why the crisis won't impact them and then imagine solutions to reduce their carbon footprint.

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