

CASE STUDY 1

Game over for the travel as we know it

European integration in our daily lives means free movement of people, goods and services, and it also means solidarity among member states. In order to feel solidarity with a population from a foreign country, we have to meet and interact with each other. It is a continuous process and the EU dedicates large budgets to assure that new generations meet each other as well as grow and learn together. The Erasmus programme for European university students is only one example.

While the younger generation is more aware of climate change and global warming than any generation before, they still want and need to meet each other in their geographical environments. Low-cost airlines and a highly competitive airline market in the EU have helped to make it easy to travel even on a very small budget.

One reason why flying in Europe is so cheap, compared to the USA for example, is that the European Common Aviation Area (ECAA) has liberalized the airspaces of all EU countries, plus Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Iceland, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, and Kosovo. This means that European airlines can offer domestic flights within the EU as for example Ryanair, being based in Ireland, can operate flights between other European countries.

Although this liberalization serves the broader European goal of further integration and barrier-free movement, it has an impact on the environment as it sets clear incentives for low-budget travel.

The C-19 pandemic and extended period of strict lockdown have taught the world population that online gatherings can to some extent replace physical encounter. And, the pandemic-induced lockdown has shown that the planet benefited from decreased traveling. If we take Italy during the quarantine as an example, the waterways in Venice were cleaner for the first time in our lifetimes because tourist boat traffic was drastically reduced. Lockdown in China had caused carbon dioxide emissions to reduce by 25%. And we have seen similar effects in many of the world's major polluters.

Now that countries are slowly opening their borders again and inviting the population to travel, should we still opt for low cost airlines and assure equal opportunity for the European population to travel, or should we rather opt for alternative options and promote online gathering as a means for further European integration?

Please tackle this dilemma:

Shall the EU tax high-pollution means of transportation such as short-distance flights within the EU although this might restrict the young generation's to experience what European integration means.?