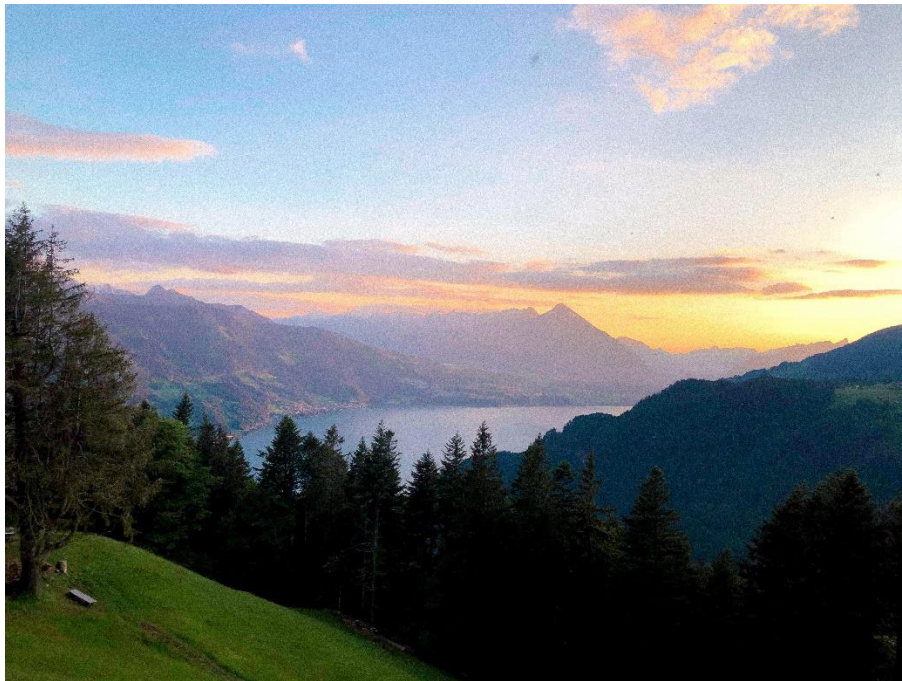# Master Thesis

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on well-being of the Chamonix community

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As strange as it would sound, I appreciate the positive changes COVID-19 brought, as without it I would not have the subject to write about or the time to focus entirely on the project writing.

Without all of them, this personal and professional achievement would not have been possible.

Abstract

The Coronavirus pandemic, known in the media as COVID-19 has changed all the perceptions of people about tourism, travel, and well-being. During a global crisis, one may think that the tourism sector does not play a big role in this equation, however, many argue that tourism play an important role due to its implication in the growth and development of many countries. A while back everyone was concerned about overtourism, and how it is affecting the destinations and its people, but at this moment in life we are experiencing an ongoing collapse in the tourism sector. Additionally, due to the strict measures of the government to control the pandemic in many localities, businesses that depend directly or indirectly on tourists have shut down their activity for months now, without knowing exactly when they will be able to operate again. Thus, these closures of tourism/hospitality businesses have led to a high level of unemployment and left people in a bad state of mind, affecting their well-being.

Such event as COVID-19 offers the possibility to learn deeper about the impact of a crisis on the tourism sector and therefore how it affects the local community. This paper will try to narrow down the impact that COVID-19 has on a community that almost entirely depends on tourism, both for the winter and summer season. It will emphasize how people are going through the changes that the pandemic brought and how it has affected their well-being. The thesis is focusing only on one destination – Chamonix, France.

In order to explore this situation, there will be conducted interviews with the residents as well as with the local stakeholders to gain more insights and reflections about their perceptions on the happenings. This paper will also explore in depth the tourism practices in Chamonix before and during the pandemic, the positive and negative aspects of tourism in the region and how COVID-19 has affected the locals and their well-being and some other data that has been discovered during the research phase.

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Introduction

The Coronavirus pandemic, known in the media as COVID-19 has changed all the perceptions of people about tourism, travel, and well-being. While some time back everyone was concerned about overtourism, at this moment in life we are seeing an ongoing collapse in the tourism sector (Baum, Tom & Mooney et al., 2020). This is caused by the government efforts to control this pandemic, by imposing strict rules such as putting a ban on travelling, social distance, stay at home and finally closing the borders of the countries and entering in a lock down (Higgins-Desbiolles F., 2020). All these measures are pushed by the desire to keep the economy stable, avoid mass deaths, and prevent the collapse of the health systems.

While there is a global crisis, one may think that the tourism sector does not play a big role in this equation, however, many argue that tourism play an important role due to its implication in the growth and development of many countries. Moreover, The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has stated that tourism is the hardest hit sector by this virus outbreak, where the UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili said: *"2020 was the worst year on record for tourism. The international community needs to take strong and urgent action to ensure a brighter 2021"* (UNWTO, 2021). Moreover, in many localities, businesses that depend directly or indirectly on tourists have shut down their activity for months now, without knowing exactly when they will be able to operate again (Ioannides D. & Gyimóthy S., 2020). The closure of tourism/hospitality businesses has led to a high level of unemployment, according to The World Travel & Tourism Council, around 174 million jobs in the tourism sphere are known to been lost in 2020 (WTTC, 2020).

As this master thesis will focus on France, it is important to know that in 2019 France recorded around 90 million visitors, becoming the most visited country in the world (Coffey D., 2021). As well, tourism sector accounts for over 8% of the France GDP, with more that 2 million people employed in this sector. However, with the virus outbreak, these numbers changed significantly, according to the Secretary of State for Tourism Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne, the tourism sector fell down by 41 % causing a loss of 61 billion euros (Desai S., 2021).
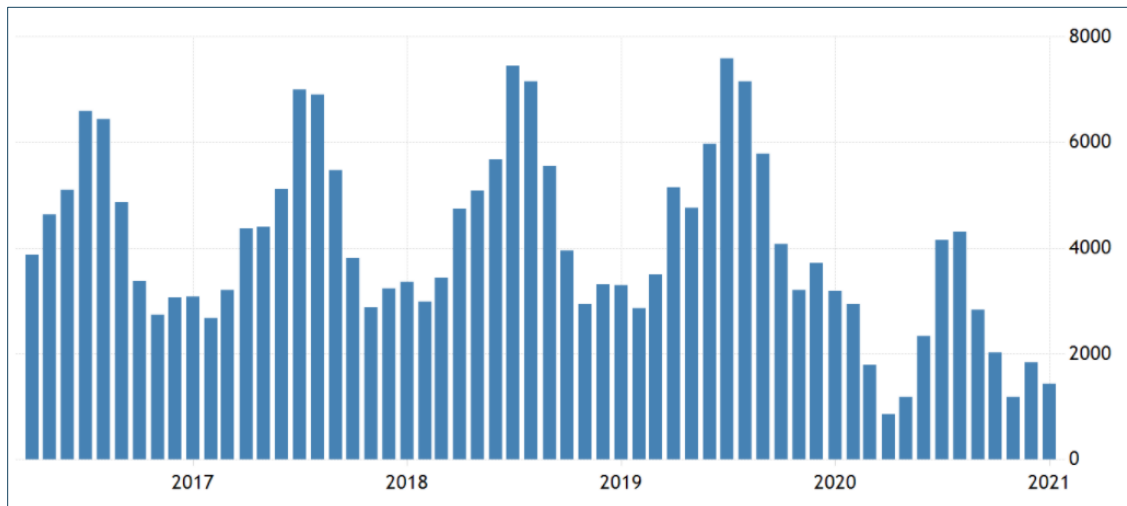
Fig. 1 Tourism Revenues in France, in mil EUR. (Banque de France, 2021)

The impact of the COVID-19 is largely felt by the people whose life and resources depend entirely on the tourism activities (Ramkissoon H., 2020). Even in the first few months from the start of the outbreak, the lives of people have been drastically changed, beyond the impact on health and income, the pandemic has risen people's anxiety and fears, altering their social relationships, trust, security concerns and most important of all – their well-being (OECD, 2020).

What is lacking in the literature at this point is the social impact the residents feel during a crisis, and how these perceptions can affect their well-being. Since limited studies have researched the impact of crises on a destination (Ritchie B. 2004; Hystad P. 2008; Prayag G. 2018) and how the locals perceived it (Stylidis D. 2017; Guo Y. et al. 2018; Ioannides D. 2020; Qiu R. et al. 2020) there comes a need to further investigate the subject of the impacts that a community has to go through. Such event as COVID-19 offers the possibility to learn deeper about the impact of a crisis on the tourism sector and therefore how it affects the local community. This paper will try to narrow down the impact that COVID-19 has on a community that almost entirely depends on tourism, both for the winter and summer season. It will emphasize how people are going through the changes that the pandemic brought and how it has affected their well-being. The thesis is focusing only on one destination – Chamonix, France, which will be presented further.

Presentation of the case - Chamonix

In 2009 the municipalities of Chamonix Mont Blanc and Les Houches have been combined, forming together the "Chamonix Mont Blanc Valley", accommodating around 13,500 permanent residents. The number however varies depending on the seasonality, according to the tourism office, there are about 80,000 people during the winter season and close to 100,000 people during the summer season (Clivaz C. & Savioz A., 2020).

After the first ascent of Mont Blanc in 1786, the highest pic in the region, the number of tourists wanting to visit this place has drastically risen, this phenomenon has been called "Mont Blanc mania" in the academic sphere (Cremonese E. et al., 2019). Thus, starting with the second half of 19th century, the Alpine tourism managed to develop to a great extent, with an increasing interest from visitors and people finding a new home.

Each year, around 5 million of people visit the Chamonix Valley, mostly to admire La Mer de Glace (Sea of Ice) – one of the most popular attraction in the region. However, it is important to mention that this glacier symbolizes the impact of climate change on the environment, since it has a broad coverage in the media and is a popular research topic, linking the consequences of climatic phenomenon to the over touristic destinations (Magnin F. et al., 2015). Moreover, residents of the Chamonix Valley can deliberately observe these changes of the glaciers from their homes, as the glaciers are visible from the villages.

According to a study, besides the thinning of the glaciers, the locals have observed the shortening of the winter season, changes in precipitation level, decrease in snow, risen temperatures which result in hot summers and heat waves as well as strong winds. However, these interpretations of climate change in the region are not scientifically proven, and some argue that these elements are only the perceptions of some people based on the climate issues present in the media (Clivaz C. & Savioz A., 2020). Another study show that the local stakeholders have some fears regarding the safety issues related to the lack of snow, as well as fears with accessing certain areas of the mountain and how this could compromise the tourism sector, and therefore the economic aspect of the region (Bonnemains A. & Clivaz C., 2019).

The popularity of the winter sports has grown considerable in the past decades, therefore, many lifts have been created in the valley to host all the tourists. At this moment, Chamonix has the

highest cable car in Europe "Aiguille du Midi", which has a height of 3,842m above sea level (Mourey J. & Marcuzzi M. et al., 2019).

The main factors that generated tourism development in the Chamonix Valley belong to the natural surroundings, beautiful landscapes, proximity to the Mont Blanc Peak and mountain chains. As well, there are many water resources, and creeks that supply the Valley with water (Nistor M., 2013). Skiing is the most important activity during the winter season, there are 117 km of ski tracks, with various ability levels (starting with an altitude of 1030 meters for beginners to 4810 meters for expert skiers). Other activities that are practiced during the winter are dog sledding, ice climbing, glacier walking, ice skating, skijoring, tobogganing, and walking as well as taking the funiculars to admire the views. During the summer season, the activities slightly change to paragliding, hot air ballooning, canoeing, golfing, mountain biking, tennis, horseback riding, fishing, trekking, mountaineering (Pralong J. & Reynard E., 2005).

According to the data from the DMO of Chamonix, which will further be introduced as Appendix B, the winter season in Chamonix starts in December and ends in April, however, the winter season of 2019/2020 is known for its early closure, on 14th of March – due to the authorities measures to stop the spreading of the COVID-19 (Appendix B). This closure was at the same time as the start of the spring holidays for schools, a period when most people spend their vacation in the Alps. Due to the government's requests of "closing the mountain", Chamonix office of tourism declared a loss around 25% of the overnight stays, which are 930,000 overnight stays compared to last season. For the summer season of 2020, there was a drop of 14.7% or 584,600 overnight stays, the loss is not that significant because during the summer season the government has eased the measures and opened the local tourism (Appendix B).

It is important to also look from a different perspective when studying a destination, the one from its community. In 1741 two Englishmen have discovered the 'Chamouny' Valley with all its beauty and with the local people that were farmers (Chamonix.net, 2019). Since that day, more English as well as other foreigners have moved to Chamonix to live their lives, according to the statistics from 2017 of the municipality, 13.8% of the population is foreign, mostly females with a 7.3% (AdminStat, 2017). Due to a high number of foreign citizens some talk that there is a loss of sense of community in Chamonix, whether this is a substantial problem or not will be uncovered further in the analysis.

Problem Formulation

After defining the case, here will be established a research question that will help the reader to understand the purpose of this research paper. Thus, the research question is:

What is the impact of COVID-19 pandemic and how it affects the well-being of the Chamonix community?

In order to better answer this question and fulfill the aim of this project, there will be added some sub-questions for a better comprehension of the subject.

1. What are the positive and negative impacts of tourism on the destination and on people?
2. How is the community perceiving itself in Chamonix?
3. How has been affected the well-being and lives of people due to the pandemic?
4. How sustainable is Chamonix as a tourism destination and how it is viewed post-pandemic?

Respectively, the purpose of this project is to elucidate how the Chamonix community is perceiving the tourism impacts during one of the biggest crises ever happened in the last decades. In order to explore this situation, there will be conducted interviews with the residents as well as with the local stakeholders to gain more insights and reflections about their perceptions on the happenings.

Significance of the research

The importance of this research lies in the connection to the COVID-19 crisis, which has hit the hardest the tourism sector on a macro level as well as some destinations in particular. According to Bryman (2020, p. 90), a research project *"should at the very least hold out the prospect of being able to make an original contribution - however small - to the topic"* (Bryman A., 2012). Thus, this study aims to explore an issue that is not only valuable for the author but is important for the academic world and could inspire other destinations to implement similar practices for the well-being of their residents. More about people in a destination has talked Hollinshead K. (2009) when introduced the concept of 'worldmaking' by promoting tourism as a chance for people and places to develop. He added that we live in order to fulfill our fantasies, and unfortunately the local

populations are not given the chance to talk, they are viewed as inactive and voiceless compared to the interest groups that have the power in their hands, thus this reality asks for a change and 'real action' (Hollinshead K., 2009).

It is important to state however that this project is a case study - it will be targeted, and it will give insights about a single destination – Chamonix. As the research project focuses only on the Chamonix community, it will show in more details how a destination has perceived such a hit and how it will manage to act further. Which could be therefore useful for other destinations, in the context of knowledge sharing for the aim of improving the lives of the locals.

Additionally, it is important to mention that the pandemic crisis is constantly changing, more research emerges as the time passes, and the lives of people may be influenced differently depending on the time period you look into. Thus, the time frame of this research project is between February – May 2021.

Structure of the study

This section will give a better understanding to the reader about the structure of this thesis, in order to ease his journey throughout the study. The project will be structured into 5 distinct chapters.

Chapter 1 will talk about the background, presenting to the reader the case study and will introduce the topic that was chosen. It will also present the research question that defines the research project followed by the sub-questions to help analyze deeper the case.

Chapter 2 will guide the reader through the methods of data collection, will provide an understanding of the theory of science chosen, will describe the primary and secondary data, as well it will discuss about the validity and trustworthiness of this project. The last part of this chapter will reflect critical about the challenges met and tracks that went wrong.

Chapter 3 will create a foundation which will be further stepped on to write the analysis part. There will be created a link between the impact of tourism on a community and how it affects their well-being and desire for sustainable tourism development and lastly there will be reflected upon the literature gap found.

Chapter 4 will introduce and analyze all the empirical data collected through the research, will discuss the findings through critical thinking in order to answer the main research question. The aim of this part is for the reader to understand how the writer has interpreted the data collected.

Chapter 5 will draw a conclusion based on the analysis part, it will give an overview of all work done. The purpose of this part is to walk the reader through the knowledge gained, briefly answer to the research question, and instigate for further research and discussion on the topic.

Methodology

The aim of this chapter is to cover the methodological considerations of the research paper in order to answer the main research question. In this section will be described the philosophical approach and research design that will embody the backbone of the master thesis. It will also highlight how the data has been collected and analyzed, including both the primary data collection and the desk research. At the end of the chapter will be discussed the limitations that have been encountered during the project writing and critically reflected on what could have been done differently.

Research design: case study

Case studies are widely used in the tourism research, mostly in the contexts of planning and development or community perceptions of the tourism impacts or host-guest relationship and market research (Xiao H., 2010). One of the reasons of case studies becoming so recognized is because of limitations that quantitative methods have in providing a clear and in-depth research regarding social problems (Zainal Z., 2007).

In order to create a better understanding of the case, the case study approach presumes a multiple source of evidence, both the quantitative and most commonly qualitative data (Crowe S. et al., 2011). The use of multiple sources of data is known to increase the validity and trustworthiness of a study, which will be talked about in the following subchapters. A present assumption is that a variety of data collected will help create a holistic picture of a phenomenon (Crowe S. et al., 2011).

A case study research allows the researcher to go beyond the quantitative methods, explore in depth and understand complex issues of a small geographical area, in the case of this study of the Chamonix Valley. According to Yin (2014) it becomes relevant to apply a case study design in a research when it has 3 criteria: the main point of the research is a current real phenomenon that takes place at this moment in time; the researcher has no control over the event; the research questions seek to understand and dig into the phenomenon to uncover what stays behind it (Yin R., 2014). In this master thesis, there will be analyzed the phenomenon of COVID-19 and how it affected the lives of people from Chamonix Valley, by asking questions such as 'what', 'how' and 'why' to explore the whole event. The destination has been chosen since the author has lived the past year in France and has an outstanding curiosity about the effects of the pandemic on a touristic place as the Alpes are. Moreover, the Chamonix Valley relied only on tourism and without it, it

seems that most people are left unemployed. This thought made the author explore and learn more about the effects of the pandemic on a touristic place, and thus Chamonix Valley has been chosen as it touches on most points that makes a case study. With this method, it became possible for the author to research a broad topic and then narrow it down, so it gives the desired outcome from the research question.

Philosophy of Science

According to Egholm 2014, philosophy of science aims to understand and explain the interconnections in the world (Egholm L., 2014). Also, the pivotal point of a philosophy of science is to form the basis for constructing the research question and developing the research design. Fundamentally, the philosophy of science is the spinal column of a research project (Faye J., 2010). As matter of social science, this research project is about exploring a current event that interferes with the society. A key feature of leading a research in social science is that the investigator is also a part of the reality that he looks into. Thus, this research has been chosen since it covers the field of interest of the writer – pursuing a masters in Tourism, as well as living in the world that has plenty of problems, including the recent collapse of the tourism sector. Ponterotto J. (2005) argues that philosophy of science could be viewed as a bridge between science and truth, the connection with the research structure, methods and the way science is applied in a research (Ponterotto J., 2005).

The philosophy of science that is selected for this research paper is social constructivism (also identifies as constructionism), whose creator in Thomas Kuhn (1922-1996)(Taylor, 2018). Constructionism considers that there is no 'universal truth', and the world is not black and white since there are multiple truths that are determined based on our subjectivity (Kukla, 2000).

According to Egholm 2014, social constructivism does not focus on an individual perspective solely, but on a group, as it creates the reality collectively, from a historical, political, or cultural outlook (Egholm L., 2014). Many researchers hold the idea that in order to understand any phenomenon it is best to view it in different contexts, therefore, social constructivism considers that all kinds of knowledge are equally essential, without differentiating between these (Faye J., 2010).

As stated by many scholars, constructivism is one of the most used methodological school when researching the tourism sphere (Hollinshead 2004; Tribe 2006), specifically in the context of a qualitative approach (Westwood S. & Morgan N. et al., 2006). Some say that in terms of contemporary civilization, tourism is *"nothing other than constructionism in action",* which could be clearly seen in numerous aspects such as airline tickets, places as the tourism destinations and the social roles such as the interaction between the host and tourist (Kim, 2001). Some specialists support this phrase and claim that constructionism sees several viewpoints, cultural differences and recognizes the plurality of the positions, information, practices (Butowski L. & Kaczmarek L., et al., 2021).

While others argue that instead of talking about the truth, constructivism just directs the discussions to possible interpretations, all with a good base to step on. Moreover, according to Grobler, 2006, the truth is not necessary the truth, but is dependent on the norms of a given culture as well it does not research the reality, but it creates it (Grobler A., 2006).

In light of the fact that we live in an ongoing crisis, which shape and continue to change while we breath, it becomes essential in constructivism to understand the importance of the words and interacting with others for a common goal. Social constructivism will be taken into consideration during the research project and will also lead the author through the primary data collection, the knowledge will be created through conversations, interpretations of the sayings and perceptions of the surroundings (Saunders, 2009). Considering the methodological approach, social constructivism is undeniably rooted in the qualitative model of data collection, which has the hermeneutical methods of reasoning (Butowski L. & Kaczmarek L., et al., 2021).

Thus, during the interviews, as the author I have been gathering knowledge and tried to interpret in in many ways, and not have only one viewpoint. Influenced by Goodson and Phillimore (2004), my aim as a researcher has been to take into the consideration subjectivity, ethics, values and properly use the available methods to be able to fully understand and develop on the research problem. I have kept in mind to always carry with me a set of beliefs which define my worldview, often described as a paradigm in the literature (Goodson L. & Phillimore J., 2004).

There exist 3 main component that create a paradigm: ontology, epistemology, and methodology. In order to find this paradigm is necessary to answer 3 interconnected questions (Guba & Lincoln, 1998):

- The ontological question "What is the shape of the reality and what could be known about reality?"
- The epistemological question "What type of relationship is there between the researcher and what could be known?
- The methodological question "How and in which way can the researcher find out what he believes could be known?

More about each view will be communicated further into the chapter.

Ontological considerations

As outlined by Egholm 2014, ontology deserves to be called the key concept in the philosophy of science, since it addresses the basic presumptions about the nature of the world we live in and where an individual standpoint is created (Egholm L., 2014). It is important to mention that Ontology holds the perspective that the reality lies in the accomplished experiences of people, whereas for tourism research, it means exploring the lives and experiences of the local communities and its surroundings (Goodson L. & Phillimore J., 2004).

As it was previous stated, the ontological basis for this research project lays in constructivism - since the main aim of the research is to discover how the community of Chamonix has been affected during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the ontological position implies that constructionism should look further into the interaction between individuals to understand and keep in mind that everything is under a state of revision (Bryman A., 2012).

The perception regarding the reality of the researcher as well as of the respondents will at some point affect the findings of the research since all these findings will be created in the process, rather than found as in the case of objectivism (Bryman A., 2012). The research will drive from the social constructionism paradigm as it seems to be the best approach in the current context, with a lot of things changing every single day. In a situation of uncertainty as it is now, facing the COVID-19 pandemic people may have opinions and perceptions that will constantly change, depending on the circumstances, so, guided by the constructivism paradigm the researcher will be able to collect data and get in touch easier with the respondents.

Epistemological considerations

As Ponterotto J. (2005) affirmed, epistemology involves in the relation between the 'knower' (the research participant) and the 'would-be knower' (the researcher). Epistemology studies the knowledge and by imposing some rules it discovers what could be counted as the truth (Ponterotto J., 2005). According to Goodson and Phillimore (2004), epistemology responds to some questions 'Who can be the knower?', 'What things could be known and what counts as valid knowledge?', respectively, the epistemological stand taken is determined by how the reality is perceived by the researcher (Goodson L. & Phillimore J., 2004).

According to Carter & Little (2008), epistemology is theory of knowledge and its contribution to a research is purely theoretical. As well, it is known that epistemology is the key to evaluating the quality of data and the analysis itself (Carter S. & Little M., 2008). Moreover, epistemology determines in which way the researcher will communicate to the respondents and will gather all the necessary data (Mantzoukas S., 2004).

In search for the epistemological standpoint, it was asked the previous stated epistemological question, which made it clear that this research paper will set off from interpretivism. It is important to know that the main process of the research will be interviews with the respondents, due to people's abilities of interpreting things and having a unique view on some topics it seems without a doubt that the interpretivism position is the most suitable for the purpose of this master thesis. A qualitative research process will be followed in order to collect and interpret the knowledge gathered for better answering the main research question. My job as a researcher will be to interact with the respondents and to understand how they perceive the current situation. More about methodological considerations and the tools for collecting data will be further discussed.

Methodological considerations

Methodology is defined as a theory and analysis that shows the researcher how to proceed with the research itself. Put simply, methodology is the study on how we, as researchers collect the knowledge about a topic, based on our definition of the reality. Methodology justifies the selected methods which produces the data and the analysis (Carter S. & Little M., 2008). The question that one should ask is "How can the would-be-knower go about finding out what he believes could be known?" (Guba E. G., & Lincoln Y. S., 1994).

Driving from the literature review, there has been discussed on the perceptions of the residents about tourism and how it affects the well-being of the local community, accordingly, there has been found a gap regarding the same perceptions in the case of a crisis. Even there is information available about an economical or health crisis, COVID-19 is relatively new that has yet to be analyzed in depth, this being the aim of the project. For a further development of this research, qualitative research method will be used and talked about in this subchapter.

Methods of data collection

It is known by researchers that one should chose a method for his project based on the research question, of what is the desired information and how to get it (Creswell J., 2003). Therefore, considering the purpose of this research, a qualitative approach will be applied. Qualitative data collection methods usually embrace observation, interviews, focus groups. In the past decades, internet facilitated methods such as e-mail interviewing or video conferencing, which have become a part of qualitative data as well (Carter S. & Little M., 2008). Qualitative research does not focus on the numbers but rather on the knowledge that is expressed using words. This method will never ask only 'what' but will always search for more, to find out the 'why' behind any piece of information. Moreover, qualitative research implies using a diversity of sources and never depends only on one data source, since it is non-linear, is demands the researcher to go back and forth between the gathered data and expand the knowledge each time (Hoepfl M. C., 1997).

Researchers say that a research aim could incorporate three forms: explanatory, descriptive, or exploratory. The research topic covers the topic of the COVID-19 impact on a community; therefore, one could argue that all three aspects can find a place in the research project. However, exploratory data analysis has been prioritized in this paper since the aim of the research is to investigate and discover rather than describe. As well, it is known that a research could be either deductive (in this kind of study the literature is used to create presumptions and premises that are analyzed qualitatively) or inductive (a study that it is started with observations and experiences and moves to themes and theories). However, a qualitative approach generally guides the author to use an inductive approach in the research, in addition, social constructivism is also based on this approach. According to Soiferman (2010), through the inductive method it is easier to observe, learn and discover the facets of a reality, it encourages the researcher to 'learn from participants' (Soiferman K., 2010).

Primary data

An important aspect of the primary data is that it is collected for the sake of the project, therefore it is inclined to answer the research question in a direct way (Creswell J., 2003). Primary data has not been published, or altered by any other people, respectively, many scholars hold the idea that it tends to be more reliable and authentic, more valid than the secondary data (Kabir S. M., 2016). Since knowledge is produced through interaction, it has been decided that there will be held interviews as primary data.

Interviews

An interview has the form of a conversation between an interviewer and one or several respondents. According to Kvale (1983), a qualitative research interview aims to gather insights from the interviewee about his perceptions about the meaning of described phenomena (Kvale S., 1983). Being one of many qualitative data collection methods, interviewing is about interaction between the researcher and the respondent, which provides a lot of useful data for the researcher. Collecting all these insights could be done in several ways, the most frequent one is face-to-face interviews (FtF). Besides the interviews in person, telephone interviews have been widely used as well. In recent years however, interviewing using the internet has become more popular, including the e-mail, messengers, apps such as zoom or skype (Opdenakker R. J., 2006).

The telephone interviews require transcription from audio to text, unlike the e-mail and messenger interviews that automatically record the interview content (Fritz R. L., & Vandermause R., 2018). Therefore, conducting interviews online removes the burden of transcribing the data, however, according to some researcher papers, online interviews come at the expense of the respondent – it takes longer than a face-to-face interview, and it takes more time for the respondent to answer in a written format (Markham, 1998). Additionally, the self-transcribing feature of online tools is of a great benefit for both the respondent and interviewer, as both of them will have a copy of the interview, which is not true for the face-to-face interview, where only the researcher will have the recording (Kazmer M. & Bo X., 2008). A problem that has risen in the recent years is the fact that qualitative researchers could impose their personal beliefs while transcribing or translating the gathered data, thus, there has been introduced the method of 'member checking' – as a validation

technique, by returning to the respondent the interview or the analyzed data so he could verify and asses the trustworthiness of the results (Birt L., et al., 2016).

According to some scholars, online communications are perceived by people as anonymous since there is no direct contact with a human being, and people allow themselves to be more open and disclose themselves to the interviewer (Herring 1996; Tidwell & Walther 2002). Thus, some people are more willing to get involved in e-mail or messenger interviews for a study, as they feel more relaxed, anonymity facilitates closes connections and disclosure of feelings, beliefs, values (Meho L., 2006). A big advantage of e-mail interviewing is that it allows the respondents to take their own time in giving the answers, since they are in a familiar environment, they will feel more relaxed to express their feelings and opinions regarding a topic (Kennedy 2000; Lehu 2004).

Being in a confinement made it impossible to perform face-to-face interviews, even though it is clear for the researcher that without a direct interaction with a respondent there could be created miscommunication and misinterpretation, therefore, to generate high quality data the researcher had to be clear with the asked questions, explicitly indicating the expected output. Follow-up questions have been asked in order to clarify the respondents' answers to gain better insights.

According to a scholar Denscombe (2003), performing online research has the same quality of responses compared to traditional methods, such as face-to-face interviews. The same conclusion has been reached in other studies (Meho & Tibbo 2003; Murray 2004) concluding that the participants in the online interviews remained more focused on the questions, providing more reflective and essential insights compared to those that did a face-to-face interview (Meho L. & Tibbo H., 2003). This is not to say that doing a face-to-face interview is not as good in value, but to underline the advantage of the online interview, which gives the possibility to review and think twice on the questions and answers, by giving more time to a person – he could be more thoughtful and attentive on the information he provides (Meho L., 2006).

Another good aspect of online interviewing according to Spender (1995) is that the concepts such as race, gender, age, or sexuality do not necessarily affect the communication, it is only the researcher and the respondent, everything else is left behind. The participants are free to respond when they feel comfortable, the primary advantage of doing online interviews is the 'friendliness' to the participant (Hershberger P. E., & Kavanaugh K., 2017). Also, online interviews could reduce the lack of proper data given by the shy participants, according to Roberts et al. (1997) the negative

aspects of shyness are usually overcome when sharing insights in an online interview where they cannot be seen, in such a way people could feel more secure and ready to open (Selwyn N. & Stewart K., 1998).

Conducted interviews

Semi-structured interviews have been used to collect the data, using the social constructivism approach in order to gather many insights about the perceptions of the respondents in regard to the researched topic. This type of interview is a mix of the structured and unstructured type, where the questions are pre-arranged before conducting the interview, mostly based on the assumptions of the author, nevertheless, the researcher gives the chance to the respondent to elaborate and describe the issues on his terms using open-ended questions (Alsaawi, 2014).

As it was mentioned above, in a state of confinement the only possible way to conduct an interview was through the use of internet. Since it is so easy to get in touch with people from all other the world, the researcher has chosen to use the Facebook platform to connect with people from Chamonix Valley. Specifically, the researcher had published a post in the group 'Chamonix', which is a public group with 17.6 thousand members at this moment. The post has been viewed by many group members and some of them were interested in participating in the interview. The researcher proposed to perform a zoom interview, a phone interview or an e-mail written interview, where each participant could choose the means that he likes best.

A research by Sturges & Hanrahan (2004), showed that allowing the participants to choose the way they want to do the interviews – increased their desire of participating in the research (Fritz R. L., & Vandermause R., 2018). A research by Luders (2004) found out that participants will likely choose the means of interviewing based on their interests, the heavy media users will likely desire to be interviewed by messengers or e-mail, as they are already familiar with the platform (Kazmer M. & Bo X., 2008).

Therefore, 3 respondents from the Facebook group chose to answer the questions in a written format and 1 preferred a phone interview. The interview has been sent in messenger, it comprised 15 questions (including questions about the job/activity that it is being done in Chamonix; the impact of COVID-19 on the life of the respondent; about tourism in the region and how it has been

affected since the pandemic, and view on the life after the pandemic), all the interviews could be found in the Appendix A1-4.

Regarding the viewpoint of the Destination Management Organisation, there has been conducted an e-mail interview, which comprised 12 questions (about the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism sector; impact on the organisation itself; about the actions that have been taken in order to deal with the happenings; about the future strategies to revive the tourism sector in the region). The interview with the Tourism Office of Chamonix could be found in the Appendix A5.

Considering that the case study is focusing on the French Chamonix community, some of the interviews have been held in French, while others in English with those respondents that felt comfortable. Also, the phone interview has been conducted in Romanian since the respondent is a Romanian citizen as well as the interviewer. It is important to mention that every interviewee has been asked in advance about the language he would prefer to answer in. For those that preferred French, the questions have been translated in order to accommodate their wishes. Accordingly, all the answers have been translated to English and will be presented both in English and in French to the reader. For the phone interview held in Romanian there will be presented the transcription translated to English.

Researchers believe that language is the core of the qualitative research, and many argue that it may be challenging when the data is collected in one language, and the research involves another and it requires translation (Temple B. & Young A., 2004). Translating from one language to another may have consequences since the meaning could differ and be understood differently in another language. Bryman (2007) have mentioned that translations could lead to distortions of the meaning, since the meaning could easily be lost because of the fluidity of the language (Abalkhail J., 2018). Some say that researchers which are able to translate their own data are in a much better position to do a cross-language data analysis, however, this does not mean that the researcher will produce better outcomes, it means that speaking multiple languages adds advantage (Temple B. & Young A., 2004). It is also argued that the researcher encounters the complex issues of medium and power, as the translation itself has the power to change or add a new sense to the gathered data, however, the power lays in how this translation is performed and integrated in the research not in the fact of the translation itself (Temple B. & Young A., 2004).

In order to make it easier for the reader to understand the conducted interviews, the table below will illustrate the participants in the interview. Due to the ethical considerations the full name of the respondents will be omitted, using only the respondent number. All the participants have given their consents for publishing their answers.

Interviewees	Gender	Activity	Familiarity with the place
Respondent 1	M	Seasonal job in tourism sector (underwater photographer) and hospitality sector (bartender)	Originally from Australia, has been living the past 4 years in Chamonix
Respondent 2	F	Freelance administrator/project coordinator specializing in travel/tourism/leisure	Originally from the United Kingdom, has been living the past 10 years in Chamonix
Respondent 3	F	Compagnie des Guides de Chamonix in the mountaineering department	Originally from Italy, has been living in Chamonix for about 1 year and a half
Respondent 4	M	Mountain guide in summer and winter	Originally from Romania, working in Chamonix seasonally since 2000, full time since 2016
DMO	F	Tourism Office Chamonix	

Sampling reflections

In a quantitative study the roles of participants and their identity is not quite important, whereas in a qualitative study people should be relevant and suitable for the aim of the research (Etikan I., et al., 2016). It is argued whether convenience sampling (people are selected based on easy accessibility, availability, willingness to participate) or purposive sampling (people that are proficient and well-informed with a phenomenon of interest and are also willing to share) is used in this qualitative research (Etikan I., et al., 2016).

Respectively, it is believed that purposive sampling has been used for the sake of this research, as the gathered data is intended to contribute to the study aim. Unlike random studies that focus on people with different backgrounds the idea behind the purposive sampling is to prioritize on those

people that share common characteristics and will be better able to assist with relevant information, in the case of this study, people that live in Chamonix and are somewhat related to tourism sector (Etikan I., et al., 2016).

At this period in time, when it was impossible to travel to the specific destination, internet seemed to be the best way to gather primary data, thus as it was mentioned above - Facebook has been used as a means to find people that could further share with their knowledge. This platform has been chosen because it has a variety of groups with multitudes of people that seem to be available for a discussion regarding a topic of their interest. This platform has been called by some scholars a rich and diverse digital platform that offers new possibilities for the social science research to be conducted online and at a low cost and larger scale (Kosinski M., et al., 2015).

There have been conducted 5 interviews, and some may think it is not enough, however, qualitative research experts have been arguing about the right answer to 'how many' are enough, thus, the sampling size is dependent on many factors related to epistemological, methodological, and practical issues. According to Sandelowski (2017) a qualitative sample size is large enough when it can unfold 'the rich textured information' of the researched topic of the study, as well it is small enough so there still exists the 'deep, case-oriented analysis' that leads to data saturation (Vasileiou K., et al., 2018). Morse J. (2015) has stated that the more useable and rich data has been collected from each respondent, the fewer of them is necessary (Morse J., 2015). Following this idea, Malterud (2016) came up with the concept of 'information power' as a guiding principle, implying that the more information power a sample contributes with, the smaller the sample size has to be, and conversely (Malterud K., et al., 2016).

The author attempted to involve a representative sample of the Chamonix community by incorporating respondents of different ages, backgrounds, with a different level of implication in the tourism industry. This is important for the purpose of this study, since people could be impacted differently by the pandemic and variables such as age, length of residence, type of work, seasonality play a vital role. One could argue whether in this analysis have participated the central actors from the community, but one important point to consider is that every actor has been invited to participate, however, some of them decided to get involved, while others were not interested in participating in this research project. A potential cost of exclusion could be the lack of valuable and important knowledge from the excluded groups (Meyer C. & Stensaker I., 2009). Thus, the

data has been collected only from those actors that were willing to participate and share with their thoughts, and it could be admitted that other actors could have also been beneficial for the sake of the project.

It is also important to highlight that the knowledge that has been constructed on during the interviews will be constantly reflected upon, as Carter & Little (2008) believed that the biggest strength of the qualitative research is that it engages with the subjectivity of each person individually, and one as a researcher should be transparent about his subjectivity and enable the reader to judge based on it. As well, the book mentioned that while doing the interview the researcher should try to set aside what he already knows so it does not influence the study (Carter S. & Little M., 2008). It has been argued by the researchers that despite the attempts to maintain neutrality, the researcher tends to see the world through his lenses, and his truth, which may influence the aspect of the research process (H., Jordan F. & Gibson, 2004). Thus, each interview has been done with peace and an open mind to fully be able to gather as much knowledge as possible.

Secondary data

Many scholars think that both primary and secondary data are significant for a successful research, as both can bring valuable information (Patton M., 2002). As regarding the secondary data, it has been given many definitions, the most important to consider is that *'it implies the use of pre-existing data'* (Creswell J., 2003). Thus, the drawback is that it may not specifically address the same issue that another researcher is looking into, and it could raise credibility and reliability issues (Golafshani N., 2003). As well since the data has been collected by other people one could not see the full picture of the data collection and interpret it differently (Tripathy J. P. , 2013).

Collecting secondary data is less time consuming than primary data, and it could be found easily with the help of the internet. The secondary data could be of two forms qualitative (Interviews, Focus groups, Observations, Field notes, News Channels) and quantitative (Census, Statistics, Databases) (Kabir S. M., 2016).

In this master thesis, the secondary data has been used to amplify the literature review and to support the primary data collection. The sources that have been used are the 2020-2021 publications from the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), The Organization for Economic

Co-operation and Development (OECD), Chamonix Mont Blanc statistics, Reports of the activity 2020-2021 of the DMO of Chamonix, Government statistical data. Bryman (2012) highlights the importance of using reports from the directorates and government *'the state is a great source of information of potential significance'* (Bryman A., 2012). Moreover, articles, journals, books, papers written by researchers or journalists have been included as secondary data in this research. News sources have been also used, and some argue that it has an important advantage - that it could provide insights that academia will take a longer time to write about (Bright J., et al., 2014). News sources are a great way to find out about recent happenings, people reactions, opinions, and attitudes about a current event. For instance, during the COVID-19 lockdown, media has become a crucial communication tool for creating information, disseminating, and consummating it. However, a study showed that media has been a major driver of the public's attention, but the attention declined with saturation of news about the pandemic (Tsao S.F, 2021).

In the past the credibility of internet sources has been questionable, but not anymore. As the internet advanced, a lot of books and journal articles became available online and could be accessed when you do not have the possibility to go to a physical library (Kabir S. M., 2016). More about the reliability and validity of the data used and the research paper itself will be presented further.

Validity & Trustworthiness

The qualitative research has been labelled as 'non-scientific' and an inferior approach to social life for the past 25 years in the social science disciplines. Therefore, the qualitative practices tend to be viewed with caution over the reliability and the validity of the work by some scholars (Goodson L. & Phillimore J., 2004). Trustworthiness is about demonstrating the true value of the research, allowing for the external judgment regarding the research paper and its findings. There are many techniques that could be used to increase the trustworthiness of the qualitative studies. The one that will be used in this paper is triangulation which was firstly used in the military and navigation science before it has been adapted to social science. Triangulation puts a limit to the personal biases of one researcher and enhances the trustworthiness of the research (Guion L., 2002).

Denzin (1978) have identified four types of triangulation, combining the data sources, methods, investigators, and theories, he also stated in his book *'The greater the triangulation, the greater*

the confidence in the observed findings (Goodson L. & Phillimore J., 2004)*'*. The most distinct one that has been used is data triangulation, as one can draw conclusions based on multiple data, both primary (interviews in the case of this paper) and secondary (research papers, books, news channels) as well as field notes created immediately after the interview, which often give another point of view according to some researchers. As stated by Hales (UNAIDS, 2018) the most important aspect of data triangulation is that it could contribute to a much better comprehension regarding a situation or a phenomenon (UNAIDS, 2018). Therefore, the strength of this research paper is that it used several interviews, and it gathered insights from people with different backgrounds, nationalities, experiences, and perceptions. There has been collected a large pool of information and relevant data that guarantees that this research could be reliable, valid, and trustworthy.

Limitations and critics

The structure of the analysis has been changed several times, as it may be logical and clear for the researcher, from the point of view of the reader there could lack the clarity between the connections and the knowledge used. The researcher has chosen to perform interviews as primary data in order to collect more in-depth insights about the phenomenon researched, it is acknowledged the risk that only few interviews with some people could not possibly give the overall view from the Chamonix community, as the community itself presumes thousands of people in this case. As well, it should be recognized that the interviews mostly have been held with expatriates and it offers a view from their perspective, not necessary the French residents perspective.

A practical limitation has been in the recruitment of the respondents, the author could not recruit people that did not have any contact with the tourism sphere, or people that work in the Town Hall, or other businesses that could bring an important viewpoint, since all the people that responded to the post in the Facebook group were related in some way to tourism (even though it has been mentioned that the author is looking for any resident that lives in Chamonix for the sake of the project). All these people would have had an interesting point of view and impact on the research, making the sample more representative of the local population. In fact, the lack of desire to participate added to the lockdown have prevented the author to recruit a larger number of respondents, which could have strengthened the analysis and the validity of the research. Moreover, a larger sample would have meant a variety of profiles, ensuring a much superior

representation of the locals which could have potentially resulted in more detailed and relevant findings. Nonetheless, as it was mentioned previously the author considers that 5 interviews are sufficient to achieve a satisfactory level of data saturation.

Since the data collection took place in the middle of the pandemic, while the French authorities imposed the 3rd confinement it was challenging to conduct the interviews face-to-face. Therefore, the interviews have been done online, by e-mail, messenger, or phone call. It is clear for the researcher that while conducting an interview is important to have a conversation-like setting, to create a dialogue, as knowledge is formed from interaction. It is also acknowledged the fact that the information given by the interviewee and the knowledge perceived by the interviewer could differ, as each person has its perceptions in life and views the truth and reality differently, however, the researcher tried to set aside the previous knowledge and all the biases for a clear view on each interview.

Another limitation with the interviews was the fact that some respondents have changed their mind and never returned the questions answered, probably from the lack of interest or any other problems that might have occurred. As mentioned in the literature, this is a normal episode during the e-mail interviewing, as this type of data collection is more susceptible to the participant attrition (Kazmer M. & Bo X., 2008). As well, in order to gain a better view of the ongoing situation in Chamonix, the municipality has been contacted, however they lacked the time for an interview adding that the office of tourism should be able to answer all the questions. This could be a consequence of the pandemic, people became more 'closed' and lack the desire to talk about their feelings to strangers or are too busy with dealing with their own problems.

Another limitation is the research design chosen – case study, as it is criticized by many scholars due to the stereotypes that it embodies, including that it should be used only at the exploratory stage of the research, it leads to unconfirmable results and conclusions, it is a method of the last resort (Yin R. K., 1981). Another scholar mentioned that in a case study the knowledge and expertise of the researcher is essential and thus, it could be an issue regarding the objectivity and researcher bias (Hodkinson P. & Hodkinson H., 2001). He added that a big limitation that a case study has is the impossibility to generalize the results and most of the time the sample size is small, and the data is nonnumerical, as in the case of this research project (Hodkinson P. & Hodkinson H., 2001).

Ultimately, there have been used various sources for the sake of this master thesis, and some of them may be in contradiction with each other, however, it is kept in mind that there exist multiple realities, and there are many ways to look at something.

Literature review

In the literature can be found several sources that have researched the impact of tourism on residents' life (Charag et al., 2020; Suess et al., 2020), however, there is a lack of studies that investigated the impact of tourism during a crisis and how it can affect the well-being of the locals. Also, it is argued that most tourism studies focused on the crisis management from the tourists' point of view rather than the perspective and feelings of the local community (Ramkissoon H., 2020). Thus, it is a pivotal point to study the perceptions of residents, especially during the COVID-19 times, when tourism and everything that we know is transforming in front of our eyes. There is a study that conveyed how a crisis impacts a community and their desire for tourism development, encouraging for further investigation, however there are limited sources to support it (Qiu R. & Park J. et al., 2020). Therefore, this research paper will present theories in order to dig further and explore the community's perceived impacts of tourism during a pandemic and it will unveil its support for tourism development and how it influences the quality of life.

Studies show that the attachment to a surrounding has a deep positive impact on the well-being of an individual, and the place attachment theory supports this saying. Moreover, in the tourism context, this theory is interpreted as an emotional bonding between a person and a place (Ramkissoon H., 2020).

The premise of this research is that the interaction between residents, tourists, and the place (Chamonix Valley) could create meaningful relations that will lead to a sustainable tourism development and will positively impact the well-being and the quality of life of the community. There will be created a link between the place attachment of the locals with the perceived impacts from tourism and their desire for sustainable tourism development, which will further increase their standard of living.

The conceptual model that is used will be shown in the Figure 1, which will try to analyze the COVID-19 impact on Chamonix community. Also, it is important to keep in mind that this thesis has practical implications for a sustainable community and a sustainable development of tourism in the Post-Pandemic context.

Figure 2. Conceptual model, adapted from (Ramkissoon H., 2020), page 4.

Tourism impact

Literature says that the perceptions of the locals towards tourism could be traced back to more than 45 years ago, with several studies that researched it deeply in the past years (Ramkissoon H., 2020). Accordingly, it was concluded that tourism influences directly and indirectly a destination and its people, and each stakeholder feel the impact differently. The focus of the previous research papers has been mostly on the economic impact of tourism, while the social impact has been left behind, at a conceptual level (Liu & Var, 1986; Pfizam, 1996). Also, few studies have analyzed the social costs of tourism for a destination during a disaster or a crisis, even if they did, these studies have approached this problem from the tourists' point of view, leaving out the host community (González P., 2020).

In the past couple of years, researchers started to analyze the impact of tourism on the society and what is the social cost they have to pay for benefitting from tourism activities. From the research papers it could be concluded that it is in fact possible and real to measure the impact of the tourism on society, by looking at the prices of the real estate, the crime numbers, the employment rate in the tourism and hospitality sector, overcrowding in the common spaces and even the cultural and heritage changes (Stephenson M. & Knight J., 2010). However, it is important to keep in mind that

to obtain these measures may be difficult as the society is impacted indirectly and each community has its own perceptions about the perceived impact depending on their set of values (Qiu R. & Park J. et al., 2020).

According to a study by Garau-Vadell et al. (2018) it was discovered that a crisis has the ability to increase the willingness of residents to approve and like the tourism activities in their region because it impacts their previous impression about the influence of the tourism. More research supports this idea, as during a crisis the community pays more attention to the economic value that a sector brings and becomes more tolerant to the happenings (Garau-Vadell et al., 2018). Another research came up to suggest that a crisis brings out the best in a community, in the interviews held, most of the respondents were willing to donate money in order to reduce the social impact of tourism when dealing with a pandemic, moreover, residents showed responsible behavior and desire to help (Qiu R. & Park J. et al., 2020).

However, it was brought to light in a research paper, that the negative perceptions and the negative impact of tourism can also be intensified by a crisis. In a research paper by Epstein et al. (2007) that analyzed the influence of a pandemic on the tourism sector, it was mentioned that an infected tourist could bring serious health consequences to a destination, which will therefore affect the perceptions of the residents towards tourism (Epstein J. et al., 2007). Fortunately, over the past years there have been explored ways and tools that could understand the residents' perceptions regarding tourism, one of which will be presented and explained further.

In a research it was explained that an individual perceives tourism and the tourists depending on the positive and the negative impacts that they feel or see. Moreover, researchers have come to an agreement to what these impacts mean and how to characterize them. The positive outcomes that emerge out of tourism have been classified as "benefits" and "opportunities", while the negative outcomes have been characterized as "costs" and "concerns" (Chen S. & Raab C., 2012). So, the benefits that a community or a resident can gain from could include: a rise in employment and business opportunities; better infrastructure and recreational facilities for the locals; rehabilitation of the historical sites; more restaurants, shops and other amenities that has as aim to enhance the social life; maintenance of natural spaces; and an increase in tax revenues (Harrill, R., 2004). While the costs that a resident could pay may include: a rise in prices for the goods and services bought

as well as for housing; traffic congestion; a high crime rate; alteration of the culture, traditions; degradation of the habitat; which all lead to poor living conditions (Chen S. & Raab C., 2012).

A study by Woosman et al. (2018) has linked the positive interactions between the host community and tourists with the place attachment. Distinctively, how the perceived impact of tourism has the power to directly influence the residents place attachment, with a focus on place identity and place social bonding (Woosnam, K. M., et al., 2018). Another recent study presented that in a pandemic crisis, a community will be more tolerant to the impacts of the tourism and will even try to bring back to life the tourism sector in their region. Additionally, those residents that perceive the impacts of tourism positively they might develop a remarkable sense of attachment to their habitat, by involving in the community life, contributing economically and socially to the well-being of their peers (Ramkissoon H., 2020). More about the link of impact of tourism and place attachment will be described further, as now is more actual than ever, with the COVID-19 context - when destinations focus on exploring and bringing to light their domestic tourism market (Carr A., 2020).

Place attachment during COVID-19

There are numerous studies that have explored place attachment, however, all of them in a different context, such as residents' perceptions and image of place (Stylidis, 2017); residents' attitudes regarding tourism activities and development (Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2012; Ramkissoon, 2012); tourism authenticity (Ram et al., 2016).

During these changing times, place attachment is an important aspect that gives people a sense of closeness and connection. According to some researchers, place attachment could be utilized to promote community involvement and development of the tourism in the post-pandemic context (Majeed, S., & Ramkissoon, H., 2020). In the pre-pandemic time, place attachment has been associated to pro-environmental behavior, well-being and achieving the common goals of a community (Scannell, L., & Gifford, R., 2010). As for the tourism context, it is argued whether this theory is explored enough to link the resident's perceptions towards tourism with the place attachment theory (Majeed, S., & Ramkissoon, H., 2020).

Place attachment correlates with the spiritual and mental bonds that have been created between a person and a place. Also, place attachment is considered a great marketing tool for tourism, which

has a big influence on creating a positive or a negative perception for a tourist towards a destination (Mashapa, M. et al., 2019). A study shows that a pleasant tourism experience will determine the satisfaction of a tourist and the emotional attachment to a place, however, it should be examined further how satisfaction will influence the place attachment (Io, M.-U. & Wan P., 2018).

It is important to mention that a big part of the research found has focused on the social aspect of place attachment, meaning that people become attached to a place that encourages social and collective relations. Some characteristics play a huge role to influence the interactions, such as the proximity, density, presence of different facilities (clubs, restaurants, parks) (Fried, M., 2000). According to some scholars, place attachment is commonly associated with the "sense of community", which is viewed in two distinct ways. The first one, is community based on interests – members are joining because of the common interests, a similar lifestyle and way of living (Kasarda, J. D., & Janowitz, M., 1974). And the second one, which it will be interpreted in this master thesis - community of place, where members are connected because of their spatial location. The later one is more relevant since it focuses on the bond rooted in place, such as neighborhoods, the local businesses which promotes social interaction (Scannell L. & Gifford R., 2010).

As mentioned in a study, the locals could contribute to the recovery due to the COVID-19 crisis, through their engagement and actions to preserve their community (Higgins-Desbiolles F., 2020). Moreover, because of the high levels of place attachment people become motivated to address the problems that they are facing to fulfill the common goals. Through the place attachment, the community will work together, it will inspire the local stakeholders to improve their practices for a more sustainable domestic tourism market post-pandemic, which ultimately will contribute to the well-being of the whole society (Ramkissoon H., 2020).

Sustainability in Tourism

The most-known definition of sustainable tourism was used by the World Tourism Organisation in the Guide for Local Planners on Developing Sustainable Tourism in 1993, on page 7, stating that sustainable tourism is *"tourism which meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future"* (WTO, 1993). As a term, sustainable tourism is interpreted as an alternative type of tourism which aims to improve the way of living of the host community, while delivering an exceptional experience for the travelers and keeping a

good aspect of the nature around. Moreover, sustainable tourism attempts to diminish the negative influence on the local community and the environment while serving for good the local population (Yu, C. & Simon P. et al. , 2011).

More research highlights the fact that sustainable tourism and its development is not a fixed state of harmony, but it is always in motion, with different changes that aim to bring balance and growth to fulfill the needs and wishes of people (Zhenhua L., 2003). Moreover, sustainability has been always regarded as an aspiration and a solution to address the negative aspects of tourism as well as a path to liveliness. In a research by Bramwell & Lane (1993) sustainability has been viewed as an effective method to diminish the pressure and the tension that is generated by the interaction of the tourists with the host community and its environment, so in the long term the equilibrium is sustained (Zhenhua L., 2003).

In the research paper, Cater E. (1993) has underlined 3 concepts or goals that a truly sustainable tourism destination should have, these include: meeting the demands and desires of the host community – by enhancing their living standards in the short and long term; fulfilling the needs of the emerging number of tourists and continuously aiming to attract more in order to reach the first goal; preserving the natural habitat in order to achieve the previous 2 goals (Cater E., 1993).

However, the literature argues that as whole, sustainable tourism should emphasis on the needs and wishes of the biggest stakeholders in the region, for their integrated, practical, and dynamic collaboration in order to implement the best strategies to keep the community in continuous development (Yu, C. & Simon P. et al. , 2011). In several research papers (Sharpley, 2000; Siraya & Ekinci & Kaya, 2008) it was mentioned that in order for the sustainable tourism to flourish and develop it is necessary for the major stakeholders to collaborate successfully. In some literature (Murphy, 1985; Ap, 1992) it is highlighted that residents are the most important stakeholders, and their opinion and desires should be considered primarily because they are being directly influenced by the tourism, regardless of their career and occupation. Therefore, if a resident is open minded and affectionate, it will directly impact the tourist satisfaction and desire to travel to the same place, generating more economic benefits for the destination (Streimikiene D. et al., 2020). Since it is so important to involve the community in the tourism activity, it is necessary to understand their attitudes and perceptions towards sustainable tourism practices.

Social Sustainability

It is widely known that the social dimension of sustainability is the least developed out of all three pillars: environment, economic and social (Partridge, 2005; Vallance et al. 2011). According to a study in 2011, Nicola Dempsey affirmed that social sustainability is not fixed or constant, and it should be viewed as a dynamic concept which will suffer some changes during time. It is argued by many researchers that the interpretability of this concept can be viewed both as a weakness or a strength, meaning that it will stimulate and inspire some to communicate and discover it further, while it may demotivate some to always have to explain what they mean when approaching social sustainability (Boström M., 2012). Therefore, over the past years, there has appeared literature that focused on defining social sustainability (Lehtonen, 2004; Pawlowski, 2007; Larsen, 2009; Seghezzo, 2009).

The social part of the sustainability concept indicates mostly the necessities, rights, and the well-being of humans, but it also focusses on the involvement of the community in the decision-making process, empowerment, and access to knowledge (Boström M., 2012). Some hold the reasoning that social sustainability could be measured, if considering the unemployment rate, community engagement, income in gender equality, while others say that it is unthinkable to measure the well-being of a community, or the quality of their lives (Helgadóttir G. & Einarsdóttir A. et al., 2019).

Social sustainability is described as a process that intends to create a sustainable environment that promotes well-being, by understanding the needs and wishes of people from a community. The Western Australia Council of Social Services communicated that *"a socially sustainable community should be equitable, diverse, connected and democratic, that provides a good quality of life"*. (ESG, 2020).

Community-based tourism (CBT)

It is argued that in the literature, CBT is known as an iteration of sustainable tourism, which is presented along with the community involvement, socio-economic sustainability, and environmental durability. Mostly, this concept is defined as 'a type of sustainable tourism', that intents to develop a community by implicating the locals into the tourism projects, to attenuate the poverty levels and create an alternative income for the members of a community (Connelly A. & Sam S., 2018).

According to a research by Russel (2000), community-based tourism should achieve three principles: it should be approved and encouraged by the residents of a community; the economic gains should be passed on to the locals so it can benefit the destination; is essential for the tourism to not have a negative influence on the cultural identity and on the natural environment (Russell P., 2000). Respectively, community-based tourism seeks to benefit the inhabitants of the community through implementation of sustainable practices, empowering and strengthening the community to achieve the common development aims (Matilainen, A., et al., 2018).

It is argued that there are several challenges that correlate to the community-based tourism, such as the different views about this concept among the stakeholders, unbalanced power between everyone involved, dependence on the external support for the community (Sharpley, 2000; Goodwin & Santilli, 2009; Tolkach & King, 2015). Moreover, previous publications have mentioned that there is a need for proper techniques and tools to create a purposeful collaboration of the residents with the local businesses and other stakeholders for a sustainable development of their destination. As regardless of the issues one can meet, community-based tourism has been known to potentially impact positively the economic, social, and environmental aspects of the tourism industry, therefore, affecting favorably the well-being and the life quality of the residents (Matilainen, A., et al., 2018).

Some scholars view CBT as a tourism that considers the environmental, social, and cultural sustainability (Suansri P., 2003). Others believe that this type of tourism is managed and owned by the community for the community, that aims to facilitate the interaction between the visitors and the locals, where it will be raised awareness about the way of living (Mtapuri O. & Giampiccoli A., 2019). And others think that CBT should be looked on through a lens that embraces social justice and a redistribution approach, focusing on alleviating poverty and facilitating development of deprived community members (Saayman M. & Giampiccoli A., 2016).

In the handbook "Community based tourism" by Suansri P., the author mentioned that CBT does not aim to maximize the profits for the tourism businesses, but it is rather interested with the impact that tourism has on the community and on the environment. This concept is using tourism to strengthen the capacity of the tourism businesses with the involvement and participation of the local people. As well, this author considers that one should apply a "holistic" view when studying the community (embracing the social, cultural, economic, environmental, and political

development factors), which will help to maximize the knowledge and develop a sustainable community and influence their standard of living (Suansri P., 2003).

A similar idea had another scholar, stating that the idea of community-based tourism should put a bigger accent on the active participation and empowerment of the residents in the tourism possibilities (Goodwin H. & Santilli R., 2009). Besides, The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) declared that the CBT should be managed and coordinated at a community level, with the aim to build a better understanding between people, protect the socio-cultural aspect and therefore influence the well-being and the quality of their life (Mtapuri O. & Giampiccoli A., 2019).

Well-being

Well-being has been considered important by philosophers and sociologists since the beginning of time, as well as the human life satisfaction and meaning of happiness which have been linked to the term of well-being (Smith M. & Diekmann A., 2017). In the last decades, tourism studies started to look deeper into the meaning of well-being, and there appeared studies inspired from philosophy and psychology (Uysal & Sirgy, 2007; Bloom et al., 2010; Kruger, Lee & Yu, 2011). However, according to Melanie Kay Smith, in "Tourism and well-being", it was mentioned that research in this field is in its infancy, as there are not enough resources that could be considered theoretically, empirically, and practically relevant to a study (Smith M. & Diekmann A., 2017). Some others note that the concept of well-being has been used rarely in the tourism sphere, while others debate on the best ways to portray how tourism influences the positive perceptions of tourists and local community as well as their welfare (Pyke S. & Hartwell H. et al., 2016).

The concept of social well-being was proposed by Keyes in 1998, describing it as the perceptions of an individual towards the quality of his relationships with other individuals, friends, and communities (Keyes, C., 1998). In the psychological context, well-being is defined as something private, related to the occupations in the personal life, while social well-being is defined as a public phenomenon, that is centered on the social challenges that a person could experience in their neighborhood, or community (Keyes, C., 2006).

According to Rollero & Piccoli (2010), there could exist five dimensions that represents social well-being: social integration (when a person recognizes how to be a part of a community and

what is his relationship with the society); social acceptance (having trust in others and thinking positively about the human nature); social contribution (the sentiment of being an important member participating in the life of the community and bringing a value to the world); social actualization (evaluating the potential that a society has); and social coherence (having an impression that the world is organized correctly, based on several standard practices) (Rollero C. & Piccoli N., 2010). This elaborated concept is considered by some scholars very promising in revealing the well-being of people based on their community and self-knowledge in a social context (Cicognani E. & Pirini C., 2008).

Social well-being is considered a key element of the overall well-being, together with the emotional and psychological aspects. A study showed that sense of community and involvement of the residents in the social life have a big impact on their social well-being, however, additional research is needed to support these sayings (Cicognani et al., 2001). There is another empirical literature regarding the beneficial role of community in intensifying the welfare (Chipuer et al., 2004). For supporting it, a study revealed that feelings of belonging to a community also increased the social well-being and reinforced social involvement (Cicognani E. & Pirini C., 2008). A research by Sirgy & Cornwell (2001) indicated that a community well-being embraces the living experiences and happiness as well as the overall life satisfaction. Therefore, an increase in joy, fulfilment and life satisfaction is directly proportional with the greater community well-being and high quality of life. However, there is limited literature to support this study, and there is a need to further investigate how residents' perceptions of tourism affect the well-being of a community (Suess C. & Seyhmus B., 2018).

To summarize this up, the theories proposed will help the writer to answer the main research question, which is "What is the impact of COVID-19 pandemic and how it affects the well-being of the Chamonix community?" It all starts with the premise that there is a lack of studies to analyze how a community is affected during a crisis, such as COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, this research paper will focus on how a small community feels regarding the tourism sector, how it perceives the impacts of tourism activities. And the final aim is to understand how tourism affects the well-being and quality of life of the locals.

Literature gap

There are not enough research papers that look into the social impact of tourism during a pandemic, therefore, it is challenging to compare and take insights from what other scholars have proposed. As well, the literature found online could be called a little outdated due to the constant changes in the world, specifically now during the big hit of the COVID-19 pandemic followed by enormous economic and social crisis. There could not been found any research papers that would focus on community well-being during any crisis, as well as the impact that it had individually and for groups of people.

Moreover, there is not any relevant research that has been made in Chamonix or in France in general, respectively, all the literature could have been interpreted differently based on the cultural aspects of every country or individual.

Analysis

In order to explore in depth, the research question "What is the impact of COVID-19 and how it affects the well-being of the Chamonix community?", the reader should understand the basis - how important is the tourism sector for the Chamonix Valley, therefore the analysis part will start looking into tourism as an economic and social driver, further it will talk about the impact of the COVID-19 on the social and cultural factors of Chamonix Community, and how it affected the well-being of the locals. The spotlight will be put on the locals of Chamonix valley, how they perceive their community, the tourism practices, and the future of tourism in their destination.

The conflict between positive and negative impacts of tourism

Many media platforms declare that Chamonix is one of the most famous resorts in France, and since 1924, when it hosted the Winter Olympic Games is has been attracting thousands of tourists from all over the world (Tourist destinations, 2014). According to the assessment of the year 2019 in Chamonix, around 7.7 million tourists have been visiting the Chamonix Valley during the summer and winter season, the summer season being the most commercial one, with 4 million tourists (DMO Report, Appendix B).

In the opinion of Ursache (2015), tourism is a complex socio-economic phenomenon, and it has the power to shape the society we live in (Ursache M., 2015). Correspondingly, tourism played a significant role in the development of the Chamonix as a destination, as stated by the DMO of Chamonix, "it is the influx of tourists to the valley in summer which has prompted the creation of the Montenvers railway line, the Aiguille du Midi cable cars" moreover, "activities such as mountaineering, skiing and other winter sports has led to the development of hotels, restaurants, ski areas, and shops" (Appendix A5, Q.7). In the interview with a respondent, it was mentioned that Chamonix would not be a viable place to live without tourism, especially for the youngsters that grow there and need activities that will help them flourish, adding that "I just don't think Chamonix could function the way it does without the money that tourism brings in" (Appendix A2, Q.10). It is sustained that tourism contributes remarkably to the economic growth, in its report 'Tourism for Development' UNWTO communicated that the tourism sector is the third contributor to the global GDP, it offers employment to 1 in 10 people, from low skilled to highly skilled

workers, it is linked with all other sectors and it promotes development, interaction and growth (UNWTO, 2018).

In support to this statement, a respondent stated that Chamonix used to have agriculture and farming as the main activity, but in the past 250 years the way of living has changed exclusively due to tourism "The most important way to make money is through tourism, some people have a restaurant, a hotel, or a company that works with tourists, most of regular people just lend their house through Airbnb or other platform to tourists (Appendix A4, Q.10). Additionally, another respondent agreed that tourism affects positively the valley economically and socially, and not only the hotels, restaurants, and bars but also the schools, post-offices, and hospitals, stating that "If the Chamonix community is well alive it is mostly thanks to tourism, because most residents work in this sector, directly or indirectly (Appendix A3, Q.10).

However, according to the DMO, before the pandemic Chamonix was a victim of overtourism during certain periods of the year (Christmas - New Year / winter holidays in February / summer holidays in July - August), the valley was saturated by cars, number of people at the ski lifts, on hiking trails, at the Merlet wildlife park (Appendix A5, Q.7). Furthermore, UK Climbing have stated that air pollution is reaching critical levels in Chamonix, to such a high extend that children are not allowed to play outside due to the veil of smog that is in the Valley (Berry N., 2020). In an interview, a respondent blamed tourism activities for negatively affecting their lives "Any tourism problem in Chamonix is directly caused by the number of people coming here and who live on this planet…the air quality here is going bad and there are rumors of children with cancer because of all the rubbish we burn at the déchetterie (recycling facility), during school holiday the speed limits are changed temporarily because of the pollution caused by all the cars driving here, it's ridiculous" (Appendix A1, Q. 4).

The problem with pollution is due to the high volume of traffic that passes through the Tunnel du Mont Blanc but mainly because of the wood-burning stoves, with the columns of smoke that rise from many houses (Laurenson J., 2017). As stated by BBC News, 60% - 80% of fine-particle pollution in the Chamonix Valley comes from the wood-burning stoves and the fireplaces that people use at home, and mostly the smoke could be seen only down the Valley, not up the ski slopes (Laurenson J., 2017). The same source has mentioned that starting from 2022 the log fires

will be banned in the Chamonix Valley and with time the destination will become more sustainable and cleaner (Berry N., 2020).

On the other side, it is important to mention that in 2009, there has been created The Community of Communes of the Chamonix Mont-Blanc Valley, which aims to resolve the issues related to transportation, housing, circular economy, tourism, and climate. The main goal of this organization, as stated on their website is *"to reduce greenhouse gases and air pollutants and to preserve and protect our exceptional surroundings and the inhabitants of the Valley"* (CC, 2019). In their handbook 'The positive energy GOOD PRACTICE' (2019) the organization has raised the problem of the heating systems that pollute the Valley, at this time, they encourage to renovate the homes by offering free counselling from an energy information advisor and numerous financial support schemes. Moreover, the organisation works with the local authorities, municipalities to reduce the energy consumption, limit the greenhouse gas and the harmful emissions in order to improve the comfort of the residents (CC Handbook, 2019).

When asked about the negative aspects of tourism, most interviewees communicated that overcrowding, littering, heavy traffic (especially in a fragile ecosystem such as the Alpine ecosystem), rise in rent prices and living costs is their biggest concern. Moreover, a respondent added that "These economic issues can result in social problems such as emigration, meaning that people who were born in the Valley are forced to move out from Chamonix because they cannot access real estate property" (Appendix A3, Q.5). Another respondent remarked that many speculators have gained big sums of money, especially those that work with real estate (since a lot of British people moved to the region starting from last century and bought holiday homes), and the French residents sold their houses and land until recently they realized that they cannot stay here anymore since it is very expensive. He added that the problem of real estate "Made people that work seasonally to stay in camping vans as homes, which is not that pleasant - this being the negative part of tourism, everything became too expensive" (Appendix A4, Q.10).

The DMO agreed that the Chamonix Valley is also the victim in terms of quality of life for the residents, with tourism practices the costs of real estate have drastically increased, but the DMO also affirmed that there have been taken actions regarding the housing problems and speculations in the real estate business in order to stop the loss of inhabitants (Appendix A5, Q. 9). An interviewee declared that she loves Chamonix, however for the partner and her it will be almost

impossible to buy a house and build a family in the region because the prices and the living costs are too high compared to the salaries they receive (Appendix A3, Q.13). In support to this, comes an affirmation that "Even in the supermarket prices are with at least 20% more than in other places that are 10 km in any direction from Chamonix (Appendix A4, Q. 10).

As claimed by LivingCost.org, the average cost of living in Chamonix for one person is €1200, which places it in the top 35% of the most expensive cities in the world, ranked the 78th out of 151 in France (LivingCost.org, 2020). As well, according to Mont Blanc Invest, a real estate company, the price per square meter in the Chamonix Valley is anywhere between €7500 - €13,000, indeed, some factors such as location, neighborhood, orientation should be taken into consideration when elaborating the price (Mont Blanc Invest, 2020). Nonetheless, for the locals of the Chamonix prices play a significant role in their quality of life, a respondent stated "Measures to encourage year-round-residents – and not only secondary residents – are fundamental for the wellbeing of the community. Without its community, Chamonix is nothing more than an amusement park (Appendix A3, Q. 13).

Going from here some would think that during a crisis such as COVID-19 is, the negative impacts of tourism in the community could be amplified, mostly because of some infected tourists that would visit the destination and possibly infect the local residents (Epstein et al., 2007). However, others (Lindberg & Johnson, 1997) argue that during a crisis people become more willing to receive tourists, especially during the current pandemic when most businesses have been closed and not being able to operate. As well, an aspect that was discovered during the collection of data was the fact that 'Community' is a word that it is perceived by everyone differently, depending on their position in the society. However, a common aspect that was encountered in 4 out of 5 interviews is community division, which will be analyzed further into the research project.

Feeling the community

For the past decades, community participation approach has been advocated in the sustainable tourism development, it has been considered by many that this approach will reduce the negative impacts of tourism and will enhance the positive aspects (Okazaki E., 2008). When asked about the importance of the community in the tourism practices, a respondent stated that "the resident community should play a central role in destination governance (Appendix A3, Q.12). At the same

time, Haywood (1988) affirmed that only with the involvement of all the stakeholders, local government, local residents and other businesses a true community cooperation will take place (Okazaki E., 2008). A respondent mentioned that there should take place consultations between the locals and the public office, in order to generate more ideas for the sake of the destination, as well the decisions should be taken long-term and perhaps inspired from other destinations and implemented in Chamonix (Appendix A2, Q.12).

However, it has been doubted by many scholars the true possibility of implementing community participation, as it has been criticized that 'communitarianism' similarly to romanticism is not rooted in reality, hence, applying it in real life brings many challenges (Okazaki E., 2008). Others say that this approach is time-consuming, brings many conflicts based on different interests and is often ineffective because it is hard to maintain (Addison W., 1996). As observed during the data collection, each of the respondents had a unique perspective towards the community of Chamonix. One respondent had a radical view, affirming that the government/local authorities have taken all the decisions on their own, without consulting with the community, he considered that the responsibility should be given back to people so people would decide what is better for them, additionally he added that "the government have violated our basic human rights with their COVID-19 restrictions" (Appendix A1, Q. 13).

Another respondent considered that it is much better when the decisions are being taken at a micro and not a macro level, as well, he compared France to Switzerland (where during the lockdown in Switzerland, the town hall of each community decided whether to keep their destination closed to tourists or open their doors) while in France, all the decisions have been taken at a national level, without considering each district or community individually (Appendix A4, Q. 13). Moreover, according to WHO, when there is a crisis and countries are suffering from a major outbreak of a virus, raising awareness of the population as well as community engagement seems to be the top priority to alleviate the outbreak (Xuan T. et al., 2020). Additionally, in the updated COVID-19 Strategy by WHO, it was underlined the crucial role of the community to fight against the virus, while the General Director added that the current pandemic is much more than a simple health crisis and *"It requires a whole-of-government and whole-of-society response"(page 1)* (WHO, 2020). More studies also highlighted the significance of the community to address major threats

and emphasized on the importance of building capacity for communities and collaboration with the local governments to optimize the efforts in combating COVID-19 (Xuan T. et al., 2020).

Returning to the case, the same interviewee added that Chamonix is different compared to other winter destinations, as in Chamonix tourists do not only come and leave, but there are also many that decide to stay and live there, "there are plenty of foreigners that live full time here, therefore, the community perceive itself differently (Appendix A4, Q. 12).

The last phrase has caught the eye of the author, therefore, it has been decided to dig deeper and understand what stays behind the phrase 'the community perceives itself differently'. As a negative aspect of the tourism practices, a respondent mentioned that community division is a big drawback that affects her life. She disclosed that the foreign community is quite important in Chamonix, especially the British community, adding that "It seems to me that the fact that life in Chamonix becomes harder for people who are from here 'originally' – difficult to have access to property, rise in living costs, hard to find a job which is not in the tourism sector - causes division between the 'real Chamoniards' and the 'new ones', the foreigners" (Appendix A3, Q.5.1). Another interviewee expressed the same concerns, the fact that there is hostility between the French residents and the foreign residents, despite the improved lives of 'Chamoniards' their life became much more expensive (Appendix 4, Q.12). Another respondent supported this statement, stating that there should be more integration and cooperation between the French community and the ex-pat community, "I don't feel that as a foreigner I am encouraged to be here, even though I bring money into Chamonix, pay my tax here etc. This can also apply to French nationals moving here from elsewhere in France!" (Appendix A2, Q.13).

It seems that the problem with community division is a hot topic in Chamonix, and it goes even within the public authorities, as a respondent revealed "Sometimes I feel that local people resent the amount of non-French here. I can understand this sometimes as you get non-French that are here just for a short time and are not always respectful of the place and community. But for those of us that have been here a long time I still feel sometimes that I am judged as 'temporary'. For instance, even at the Mairie (Town Hall) when managing something to do with the children I was told it would be easier if I went back to England. I know this was down to the individual person, but it was at the Mairie! Also, if you look at comments on Facebook etc. you can often see a resentment and a prejudice that goes both ways" (Appendix A2, Q.13.1).

It could be looked at this situation from several aspects, some are concerned that the term 'community' incorporates the assumption of 'collective actor', and we should not label it so by being a group of people that share mutual interests or living in the same location. Titz et al. (2018) argues that the previous mentioned factors are blurry, unidimensional, and most probably an outdated construction of the term 'community'. Further he added that this term has become a strategic framing tool for organizations or academia to be able to address easier the problems of the locals since all the actions that are being taken are shaped through the worldview of the outsiders (Titz A. et al., 2018). Others have understood the term 'community' as a group of people with a common identification who are involved in the same characteristics of livelihoods, which are essential to sustainable tourism development (Ngxongo N., 2017). However, within a group of people there will always be differences such as race, ethnicity, religion and often these differences are considered unusual and often treated as something that should vanish rather than be accepted (Songyi K. & Youngeun K., 2020). Moreover, when new people come to a well-formed community some disagreements and disputes may appear, as the language and traditions could differ, but it is affirmed by many researchers that it should be celebrated when a place is multicultural and each person should be valued and tolerated as he is (Songyi K. & Youngeun K., 2020). Lastly, all the divergences should be controlled in an efficient way since the pivotal point of the community-based tourism is the community itself (Melphon M. et al., 2018).

As observed, the community division may be the result of too many foreign residents that did not want to change anything in their life and integrate in the Chamonix community fully. A respondent mentioned that French nationals go to French bars, while the foreign residents normally go to English-speaking bars, as well "In Chamonix you could live all your life without speaking a word in French, which is different for any village that is 10 or 20 km away. There are however people that spent the past 10-15 years in Chamonix and do not speak a word in French" (Appendix A4, Q.12). This opinion is supported by another respondent, that has written a Master thesis regarding Chamonix Community, she stated that during the interviews she held most people highlighted the fact that there are foreigners who do not want to integrate in the local community. She found some issues that most French residents had with the foreign residents, which includes creating businesses with a foreign fiscal status not to pay French or local taxes, hiring only foreign staff, living in the region for years without speaking any French, having their own community, buying secondary residences, and then renting them out for a fortune to tourists. She added that "the British

community is often the target of these divisions just because it is the biggest and the most active one (Appendix A3, Q.5.1).

Ultimately, almost all of the respondents agreed that a foreign resident will always deal with 'the coldness in the air' if he will not try to integrate into the big community, moreover "especially if you live here and do not speak the language, spend your time with other foreigners then, you will also be treated as a foreigner" (Appendix A4, Q.12). However, if one will put the effort, will learn, and speak the language, adopt the culture, then the whole community will appreciate his efforts and will perceive him differently (Appendix A4, Q. 13). As Daily & Guo et al. (1996) have stated, community integration for an individual starts with appreciating the local community, respecting the institutions and its problems. Moreover, the community integration should be looked at as a multidimensional phenomenon, but on an individual level it should take into consideration the feelings of the person, highlighting the local attachment as a means of forming relations and building a strong community (Daily M. & Guo K. & et al., 1996).

One could say that tourism is the culprit in the situation created, where the community is divided in the French residents and foreign residents, but also tourism made possible for the Chamonix to become a key destination in the Alps, both in winter and summer season. Tourism has often been named 'a double-edged sword', while it could provide economic benefits and elevate the income and livelihood of the locals it could also destroy everything that has been created (Ross M. & Reid D., 2001). The current situation of the pandemic has affected the lives of the residents of Chamonix Valley, impacting both the economic and social aspects of their existence. More about the changes that happened due to COVID-19 will be discussed further.

Repercussions of the pandemic

It is already known that the most visible impact of COVID-19 is seen in the tourism and hospitality sector, the most immediate in the inbound, outbound, domestic, business meetings and other leisure activities. Unfortunately, each time when a country's economy is suffering, the tourism is the first one to get affected as people decide to cut down their travel budgets (Zabihi S. M. G., & Hokmabadi S. H., 2021). In the interview with the DMO of Chamonix it was mentioned that there have been canceled 22 business tourism events between March 15 and December 31, 2020 (which are around 4,200 people) and 10 events have been canceled since January 2021 (around 1,730

people). All these cancellations during the lockdown period resulted in a turnover loss of more than 1.3 million € and it has negatively affected the people that are employed in the tourism sector (Appendix A5, Q.1,3).

DMO communicated that all the tourism events have been canceled overnight when the pandemic has hit, "events have been postponed for several weeks at first, then for months, then to spring or autumn 2021" (Appendix A5, Q.1). The effects of COVID-19 have been felt immediately "no more reservations for seminars or conferences in hotels, restaurants. A very significant loss of revenue for the providers we work with, no hiring, or very limited seasonal staff this winter. At the same time, the Convention Bureau no longer received specifications for 2021, 2022, 2023" (Appendix A5, Q.1). The DMO added that usually a congress is organized to plan all the activities several years in advance, but due to the pandemic all the planning has stopped, and no future events are planned at this moment. Indirectly, this affected the shops, hotels, restaurants, public agents that had to lay off workers (Appendix A5, Q.1).

The DMO also mentioned that within the Tourism Office, the permanent staff has been assigned for the tasks that were usually performed by seasonal workers, this situation with the pandemic has led to the strengthening of the team spirit, the staff gained more skills such as adaptability and multidisciplinary. In order to respond to the new requests for remote meetings, the tourism center has been equipped with videoconferencing systems which will be able to perform hybrid events in the upcoming years. The Chamonix Convention Center, were there have been hosted numerous events and tourism meetings, has been adapted as a virus screening center, and currently as a COVID-19 vaccination center for the residents of the Valley (Appendix A5, Q.1). The DMO as communicated, "took the advantage of this calm period" to do different activities that were put on hold, such as redesigning the content of their website, cleaning up and reshaping the customer database, installing new CRM software (customer relationship management), working on a new commercial strategy for the end of the crisis and participating in local activities to revive the tourism activities in Chamonix (Appendix A5, Q.2).

A respondent communicated that he usually works as an underwater photographer during summer season, but since COVID-19 has struck he was unable to find any job in the tourism sector and changed as a supermarket worker (Appendix A1, Q.1). In a similar situation found herself a respondent that was supposed to work in a hotel in the heart of Chamonix, but due to the measures

taken the hotel has closed their doors to any workers, therefore, she was redirected and found a job at Compagnie des Guides (Appendix A3, Q.3). Another respondent is a freelancer that works in the travel business, during the full lock-down, when the schools have been closed, she was not able to work more than 1-2 hours per day, but overall, she has been working 50% of her usual time due to the pandemic. She added "I have lost clients that were based in Chamonix as they can't operate at the moment, but I have also gained a client in Chamonix (a holiday rental company) because it is operating but not at full capacity so it cannot employ full time staff – I am working for them on an ad-hoc basis" (Appendix A2, Q.3). Another self-employed person that works as a mountain guide and takes people on mountain skiing, climbing the Mont Blanc, hiking, alpinism has communicated that the confinement has been very harsh on him, as it was hard for him to find clients to work with since the main clientele are foreigners that could not enter the country during the lock-down, especially those that come from affluent countries such as Great Britain, Australia, Canada, United States. The only option was to work with French people or those that decided to remain in the country during the confinement (Appendix A4, Q.4).

The hardest during the pandemic was for the seasonal workers, that rely fully on tourism to sustain themselves. An interviewee mentioned that around 80% of the jobs are performed by seasonal workers, specifically during the winter season, thus, when the pandemic has hit many of them were left without an income. Moreover, he mentioned that "a lot of people came with their cars in Chamonix to work, and since the stations were open only for half of a season every one of these seasonal workers have lost their jobs. In France if you do not have CDI (a contract with undetermined time) than you are not receiving any help from the government, so these people did not receive any unemployment benefits. These seasonal workers had to stay in their cars as the rent was very expensive while some of them found another job or went back home to their countries (Appendix A4, Q.10).

Another interviewee stated that it was indeed difficult for seasonal workers to get by either with a small salary or with high rents, however, she was lucky to receive help from the state (Appendix A3, Q.4). In the figure below could be seen the unemployment rate before the pandemic in the year of 2017, where the highest percentage is almost 9 % for the age between 15-24 years (JDN, 2017). According to statistics during the first wave of COVID-19 8.9% of population was underemployed, it is important to mention that it affected mostly women (11.1%) than men (6.9%)

the underemployment rate has hit all time high of 20%, but slowly has fallen to 17.7% in the next quarters (Montpellier C., 2021).
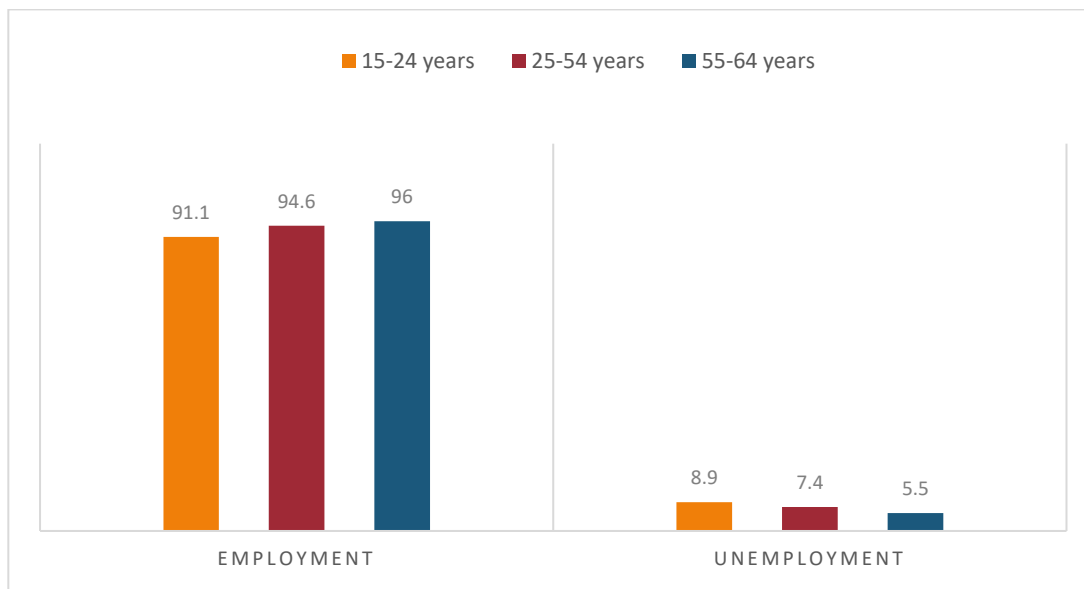

Figure 3, source: (JDN, 2017)

While some people have received the unemployment benefits from the French government, others have not been so lucky. A respondent disclosed that she did not receive any aid from the state because she did not qualify for it "You had to show your income was 50% down on the year before and mine was not. Wish I could compare it to 2019! But I do know others who benefitted from it. My husband is on a CDI and he was put on 'chômage technique' (technical unemployment) which I honestly believe saved the company he works for - I cannot see how they would have survived without it (Appendix A2, Q.3.1).

Another respondent has been on 'chômage partiel' (partial unemployment) for over two months, while her partner who is also a seasonal worker and works in a restaurant has been unemployed for the whole season (Appendix A3, Q.3). An interviewee mentioned that the state aid was welcomed, however he would rather be let to work full time than receive the unemployment benefits. He said that usually he would make 5000€ per month during high season, but the help is around 1000 – 1500 € per month, adding "it is not a lot, but I cannot complain. The system that calculated how much everyone should receive was not completely fair but well, what can I do. It is better than nothing, but for the rent, food, and Netflix it is enough" (Appendix A4, Q.6).

It is important to state that there is a phrase that has been repeated numerous times in the media 'COVID-19 does not discriminate' which many argue that is a dangerous myth and costed a lot some people (Patel J. & Nielsen A., et al., 2020). Due to the pandemic many socially and economically deprived groups became even more vulnerable to the disease. In addition to the poor living conditions these people are most likely to have unstable work conditions and incomes, which harms their mental health and weakens the immune systems (Patel J. & Nielsen A., et al., 2020). Thus, poverty causes not only a high exposure to the virus but also it weakens the ability of the immune system to combat the virus. The governments of course have taken measure to protect their people and the economy, in France many companies have created their own compensation funds that are meant to cover up to 90% of employees' wages (Fisher J. & Languilaire J., et al., 2020). These types of funds have existed in some companies, but in others there have been made adjustments and cuts in the salary of the top management, but even with these measures the unemployment was on the rise. Researchers noted that in some countries the unemployment benefits were reduced and not updated to the inflation, or the payment time has been reduced, thus the aid from the state has been unable to protect fully the incomes of some people (Fisher J. & Languilaire J., et al., 2020).

These unemployment benefits are particularly important for the single people, single parents and families that have to rely on a single job income. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, families had to maintains a work-family balance while taking care of their children and even homeschooling when the daycare facilities were closed. The pandemic has highlighted the gender inequality, with women being responsible for even more domestic labor (Fisher J. & Languilaire J., et al., 2020). A recent research from Germany confirms that during the lockdown mostly mothers took care of the children at home, with only a small percentage of households that shared equally the duties among both partners (Hank & Steinbach, 2020). Similar results have been discovered in other countries such as Spain, United Kingdom, and France (Czymara C. & Langenkamp A. et al., 2021). Thus, there is a critical indicator of gender inequality regarding the labor during COVID-19 pandemic, women being more heavily affected than men, both physically and psychologically (Czymara C. & Langenkamp A. et al., 2021). Other studies showed that during this time, more men stepped up and wanted to have an egalitarian relationship and also get more involved in the family and house duties. With more men and women working from home, it gave them the unique

possibility to embrace the balance of work-home-family and 'be in it together' (Fisher J. & Languilaire J., et al., 2020).

A study has showed that the well-being score has been on the rise in France since the confinement measure were put in place (Recchi E. & Ferragina E., et al., 2020). However, the score has been different depending on the region, for instance in Paris people experienced a decrease in their well-being compared to the rest of the country, mostly because of the small housing possibilities, small green spaces, and without the theaters, museums, restaurants, and cafes Paris was much more suffocating than any other towns. Despite the panic that the pandemic has brought worldwide, a study shows that most French people did not panic (Recchi E. & Ferragina E., et al., 2020). Some think that the strength of the French welfare system could be the factor, since France has the most elevated level of social spending among the OECD countries, and it granted a generous amount of state unemployment benefits to those that were temporarily laid off, at least 84% of the former salary (Recchi E. & Ferragina E., et al., 2020). Regarding the reported health level during the lockdown, it was registered that the working class has been hit the hardest, thus, again we could see the social inequalities that happened during the pandemic.

According to a study, workers that work on their own as well as the micro-enterprises represent around 60% of the businesses in the tourism sector, which became very vulnerable in the current crisis (Zabihi S. M. G., & Hokmabadi S. H., 2021). Particularly in the past months, the French government have mandated the closure of all the non-essential businesses, and as a result many people have been left without a stable income. Moreover, the lockdowns and the measures taken by the government have had a huge impact on people's wellbeing, more about which will be talked about in the following subchapter.

Well-being & Social sustainability

It is reported that the major consequences of the pandemic are the social isolation and loneliness. Before the crisis, people had many social opportunities where they could share their time with someone, however, once the virus hit, it abruptly interrupted any social interactions which are extremely important for the physical and psychological health of an individual (Hernandez Y. et al. , 2021). Lack of socialization is known to lead to depression, anxiety, self-harm and even an attempted suicide. In an interview, a responded disclosed that during the confinements his life has

changed significantly "I have started using drugs more often probably because of boredom and being confined and restricted", moreover, for some of his friends - life has been a misery lately "I have lost a friend to suicide during the second confinement. I believe the governments restrictions on normal life have created so much misery for so many people and there are a lot who just want to escape this oppression at any cost" (Appendix A1, Q.4).

Another effect of the pandemic was the lack of personal mobility beyond the home, for travel and leisure purposes. According to a study, during the COVID-19 lockdowns the domestic abuse and violence have escalated, more people each day became the victims of abuse and tried to escape (Baum T. & Hai N.T., 2020). Another evidence showed that each time when the measures have been eased and people could leave their house – a bigger number of couples have been filing for divorce. Consistent with this, a responded stated that due to the fact that he was not able to travel to his country of origin, and as expressed "stuck here in Chamonix" and live his normal life with traveling & working around the world in tourism "my marriage has broken up after the confinements and I will get a divorce" (Appendix A1, Q.4).

As it was mentioned in the literature, well-being is not only the absence of the disease, but it has many facets and it is achieved when a person has a healthy life, a good diet with a good physical activity as well as a good mental health and social support (Tronco Hernandez Y., 2020). At this moment in time, there is little evidence about how the current pandemic has affected the well-being of a community related to tourism, however, some scholars focused on separate domains to uncover this unprecedented circumstance. Some studies pointed out that people experienced distress, sadness, and insomnia during the lockdowns. While others mentioned that social isolation harms well-being by altering the individual's resilience to challenges (Tronco Hernandez Y., 2020). A Dutch study showed that people had a better diet during lockdown by having many healthy options at home compared to their usual working environment, while a British study reported more unhealthy eating as well as impulses to drink more alcohol (Tronco Hernandez Y., 2020).

The measures to contain the virus have led to banning the recreational facilities and cultural activities, which are directly related to the social support in humans, thus negatively impacting their physical and psychological health (Hernandez Y. et al. , 2021). A study showed that home confinement has negatively affected the physical activities of people, promoting more sedentary

behaviors such as sitting, lying down, watching TV, or playing video games, which have increased from 5 hours to a minimum of 8 hours per day, despite the wide variety of training programs that people could find online (Hernandez Y. et al. , 2021).

It is important to mention that most respondents had a positive attitude of having a lockdown while in the mountains, stating "Since the first confinement there have still been multitudes of people coming here trying to escape the cities, confinement in Chamonix is still better than a confinement in Paris" (Appendix A1, Q.7). It was a little harder for those people that have kids, during some periods the schools or kindergartens have been closed and those were the most challenging times. A respondent shared her point of view of the pandemic when the measures have been eased "When my children are able to go to school and crèche (childcare facility) our life isn't really vastly different to before. There are less after-school activities, but in some ways, this has been nice as it has made life less hectic. My husband and I are both able to work, socialize in a limited way, get a coffee with friends outdoors etc." and new strict measures have been imposed "When the schools are closed it is very different as we are trying to work, look after children and homeschool at the same time. Very stressful, we do try to make the best of it, as we are aware that we are very lucky in many ways" (Appendix A2, Q.4).

For another interviewee, the fact that he was not able to see his parents that live in another country was the most difficult part. He has felt the difference during the pandemic by not being able to travel as he desired, especially for the encounters with his beloved ones "Especially I care a lot about my family, as they are elderly, I could not be there for them and assist with everything necessary, plus nobody could come and visit, it was hard…" (Appendix A4, Q.8). He added that he does not necessary miss going on vacations "but simple things such as the contact with my family, the loved ones are important. We live in a society that we are dependent on these relationships and on traveling freely as we desire. The biggest loss is that we are not able to do whatever we were used to" (Appendix A4, Q.8).

During this crisis vulnerable communities are mostly at risk, especially those that rely entirely on a sector that has stopped operating during the pandemic. A lot of local businesses has offered possibilities of work for those in need, but during their cessation many have been left without any income, except for those that qualified for state aid. It is widely talked that without the local support, the social inequalities in a community rise significantly. However, many communities

have united during COVID-19, their fast response to the pandemic have changed entirely their fate. For instance, in Netherlands a group of people came together and offered their help to those that were unable to leave their home by doing the grocery shopping for them. In England, many people have formed a support group in order to advocate for the lives and rights of the disabled people during the pandemic. In other countries many activist groups have emerged in order to protect their communities, mostly called 'CovAid' groups (Fisher J. & Languilaire J., et al., 2020). In Copenhagen people have helped the elders by bringing food and water to their doorsteps, while in Mexico self-organized groups provided aid packages for those that did not have any savings, in Johannesburg young groups of people handed out hand sanitizers, bottles of water and food packages for those in need (Brouder P. & Teoh S., et al., 2020). Thus, because of the pandemic people have engaged or re-engaged with their community in order to have a positive impact on their lives. The academia proclaims that this is the time to show solidarity, despite the inequalities that have risen due to the crisis, everyone should view it as an opportunity to gather together as a global community and help, understand and respect each other (Fisher J. & Languilaire J., et al., 2020).

It is important to mention that a study found that eating a healthy diet and avoiding watching the COVID-19 news reported lower rates of depression and anxiety as well as the possibility to pursue some hobbies and engage with the nature (Hernandez Y. et al. , 2021). Whereas not only people benefitted from taking a breath in the nature, but also the environment improved during the pandemic, being less exploited by the tourism practices. The following subchapter will explore how sustainable could be considered Chamonix as a destination and what could be the measures taken in order to improve it.

The road to sustainability

Besides the negative aspects of COVID-19 worldwide, there are some matters that have benefitted from this pandemic. Aspects such as pollution, global warming, changes in the climate, ecosystems and biodiversity have shown positive changes due to less pressure of people on the environment (Bhuiyan M.A.H et al., 2020).

It is well known that the consequences of the air quality degradation had a significant impact on the global mortality each year, in 2016 the World Health Organization (WHO) indicated that air

pollution contributes to around 8% of total deaths in the world (WHO, 2019). The air pollution has dramatically reduced since the government introduced confinements and staying at home measures to contain the spread of the virus. Moreover, a study revealed that the readings from the Copernicus Sentinel satellite shows indeed a decrease in Nitrogen Dioxide (NO2) in those regions where strict quarantine measures have been implemented (Zambrano M. & Ruano M., 2020). Likewise, noise pollution used to be one of the sources that lead to environmental degradation, health problems and disturbing the ecosystem. Luckily, the decline in private and public transportation, in tourism practices and commercial activities has led to a decrease in the noise levels (Bhuiyan M.A.H et al., 2020).

In the Chamonix Valley, transportation accounts for around 36% of greenhouse gas (GHG), of which 46 % are assigned to only private vehicles. Especially in high season, where there are 80,000 road journeys each day which lead to high pollution. Additionally, 74% of air pollutants (NOx) are because of diesel vehicles mostly from those that transport goods in the regions, around 47% in total (CC Handbook, 2019). In the interview, the DMO seemed concerned about the high numbers of pollutants and together with other organizations have taken measures to limit the negative impact on the residents and facilitate a sustainable development of the destination. Thus, eco-mobility has been encouraged both for permanent residents as well as for visitors. A term that is recommended and promoted is to 'travel collectively', by using public transportations such as busses and trains which are completely free for all the people that come in the valley. Furthermore, the Community of Communes has aimed to build 18 km of cycle tracks by 2025, with 11 km already in place (CC Handbook, 2019).

On the other hand, Coronavirus has generated negative effects on the environment as well. For instance, in some places there have been suspended the recycling programs because the authorities were concerned with increasing the number of cases with COVID-19 in these recycling centers. Additionally, with an increase in food orderings (as the restaurants have been closed in France, offering delivery and take-aways) there was also an increase in domestic waste, both organic and inorganic (Zambrano M. & Ruano M., 2020). Therefore, the Community of Communes of the Chamonix Valley has launched a waste reduction and recycling plan which focuses on reducing the household waste by 50% and also recycle 65% of all the waste by 2025. In order to achieve this aim, the municipality has asked for the implication of all the stakeholders including the local

residents, short or long-term tourists, businesses, professionals. Some measures have been implemented to facilitate a rapid change in sustainability such as creation of several waste collection sites that will be open 6 days a week, placing compost bins near the buildings, possibility to purchase individual compost bins for only 15 €, offering gourmet bags for the restaurants to reduce the food waste (CC Handbook, 2019).

The DMO has mentioned in the interview that "the virus has profoundly changed the way people meet and organize professional meetings" and in order to meet there is not the need any more to travel by plane or take a taxi when one could just be present in a meeting within the comfort of his own office by using internet (Appendix 5, Q. 1). Thus, considering the fact that if business meetings could be dealt with online, one could rethink the concept of tourism from different perspectives. It was discussed with the DMO about the changes in individual behavior "The pandemic seems to have made more people responsible for the consequences of their consumption, including their tourist consumption. The pandemic has forced a majority of French people to choose a holiday destination closer to their place of residence or limited to French territory; it opened their eyes to their 'responsible purchasing power', one could think 'by consuming local, French products I could help maintain regional or national economic activity'" (Appendix A5, Q.10). A respondent stated that "COVID-19 proved that Chamonix relies too much on international tourism and should focus on more sustainable types of tourism (more local, more diversification, less focus on skiing). Also, it proves that the Chamonix relies too much on tourism economically as it is very hard to find a job without tourists" (Appendix A3, Q.8).

Another respondent thinks that the pandemic has shown that the domestic market is extremely important, and the businesses that catered only to foreign visitors had to change their strategy and adapt to the current situation "The whole town needs to make sure it is targeting visitors from within France, as this will surely be a growing trend as climate change starts to have more of an impact on air travel" (Appendix A2, Q.9). Similarly, a respondent mentioned that people should "value local tourism and focus on more sustainable forms of tourism, especially concentrating on families which could become loyal clients despite their reduced expenditure" adding that "as Chamonix is a big community, businesses should try to build loyalty with residents first" (Appendix A3, Q.11).

An entirely different perspective had a respondent which affirmed that Chamonix could not be a sustainable destination when there are so many people that come here on a regular basis "Chamonix Valley like our planet is a finite resource, the physical valley is not growing, the mountains are not multiplying so if the tourism industry in the valley is going to continue to grow then it could never be called sustainable because eventually there will be no space left to enjoy the valley" (Appendix A1, Q.6). Moreover, he added that Chamonix is a 'catch-22' (definition from Oxford Dictionary: *a dilemma or difficult circumstance from which there is no escape because of mutually conflicting or dependent conditions* (OED, 2020)) because "as more tourism there is, the bigger Chamonix will grow, and more people will destroy it with pollution and construction" (Appendix A1, Q.5). Another respondent had a shared view regarding the sustainability of Chamonix as a destination, on one hand she mentioned why Chamonix could be called sustainable "there is a big part of the territory which is protected (nature reserves, natura 2000, Mont-Blanc, construction bans) and I think that the mountains naturally attract a public which is sensitive to nature and, therefore, to the environment" but on the other hand she added what are the problems regarding its sustainability "the municipality has aimed to attract long-haul tourists (China, Korea, Gulf States, U.S.) and mass tourism. Infrastructures and overurbanization are also a problem, caused by this same type of luxury tourism" (Appendix A3, Q.6).

It could be seen that despite the pandemic, Chamonix in the summer season of 2020 has been crowded with tourists, as the DMO mentioned "people needed fresh air, space and nature" (Appendix A5, Q.7). But the question does not lay in how to attract more people, but how to attract the most suitable ones, as the DMO stated "there is no longer a desire for a quantitative development but rather a qualitative one: how to have fewer tourists at the same time but tourists who stay longer with less impact on the environment. The entire tourism strategy of the Tourist Office for the coming years will have to take this into account: maintaining economic activity through tourism, while preserving the environment even more" (Appendix A5, Q.7). Accordingly, the succeeding subchapter will investigate the future of Chamonix as a tourism destination.

Outlook on the future

There are some key aspects that proved to be extremely important during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as social connections and how being a strong community leads to well-being of a society. While others have learned some lessons, that privatisation and marketisation could be damaging

to public health and well-being as well as global tourism is fragile and unreliable during a pandemic (Higgins-Desbiolles F., 2020). Some argue that a more localised form of tourism should be the way to go in the future, but there are not enough sources to support this thinking. But one thing is clear, that there is this need to contribute in order to revive the tourism sector and enable human thriving with ecological and economic recovery (Higgins-Desbiolles F., 2020).

The DMO stated that luckily Chamonix as a destination naturally attracts many tourists of all kinds "contemplatives, hikers, skiers, runners, families" and as soon as the restrictions will be lifted more people will come back and visit the Valley. It added that their aim is to "preserve the nature and the inhabitants, to raise awareness of tourists about the environmental protection and the effects of their consumption" (Appendix A5, Q.8). A respondent mentioned that there is hope that soon everything will be back to normal, she said that there have been plenty of visitors while the travel restrictions have been eased (in August 2020, New Year 2020/2021, February 2021) and this makes her think that "Chamonix will be popular and busy as soon as restrictions are fully lifted – the demand is still strong". She added that many businesses have adapted and became stronger in the face of the pandemic "restaurants and bars added takeaway/delivery options, shops moved their sales online, businesses offer delivery" and because of these implemented changes it became possible for them not only to stay afloat but to flourish for some of them (Appendix A2, Q.5). However, not all the companies managed to adapt, maybe because of the location or the services they offer, resulting in suspension of their activity for short or long term, "I already know of a couple of businesses that have ceased trading during this time (Appendix A2, Q.5).

Many researchers have argued whether the COVID-19 pandemic is a transformative moment or an opportunity for change (Davies 2020, Gills 2020). According to McKinsey 2020, the pandemic is not only a crisis of massive proportion, but it is also a forthcoming restructure of the whole world (Hall M. et al., 2020). Davies W., a sociologist, and a political economist has affirmed that it may take years for the COVID-19 crisis to be really understood, further he sees the pandemic as a global turning point with a lot of aspects in the middle, adding that *"a crisis of this scale will never be truly resolved until many of the fundamentals of our social and economic life have been remade"* (Davies W., 2020). Completing this idea, another researcher mentioned that people should act differently and change their habits, adding *"It is time to awaken. A different reality is possible. It is we who must respond to the crisis and collectively create a different future"* (Gills

B., 2020). Even though it is vastly discussed about turning crisis into innovation, there is missing the inspiration and action of this change, there have not been taken any steps toward it so far, and it requires much more theory and sources in order to proceed (Hall M. et al., 2020).

Following the above mentioned, it is discussed that due to mass unemployment most countries will work against international travel and will likely promote patriotic messages to rebuild the domestic economy. The promotion of domestic tourism as a recovery strategy is not new in the literature, it has been used as response in some destinations during crises, in countries as Kenya, Malaysia, Turkey (Woyo E., 2021). Domestic tourism it is expected to recover much quicker to pre-pandemic levels compared to the international tourism. However, a study has examined the sustainability of using domestic tourism as recovery, and its findings show that this recovery depends on how affordable and attractive is the destination itself as well as how accessible are the domestic attractions, thus, the promotion of the domestic market may not be suitable for all the destinations, as some are relatively inaccessible due to lack of internal flights or bad roads (Woyo E., 2021).

It is argued that at the end of 2020 the domestic market has started to gradually recover compared to the international tourism, since only 22% of the global destinations have slowly eased the travel restrictions for foreigners, and two-thirds of the destinations remained completely closed for internationals (Hussain A. & Fusté-Forné F., 2021). With the current situation of the pandemic, we have to keep in mind that domestic market is the main hope for the recovery of the tourism industry, thus, as an immediate crisis recovery would be focused on the visiting of family and friends as well as business travel (Hussain A. & Fusté-Forné F., 2021). Moreover, it is expected that as a tool to boost the national economy, domestic tourism will be promoted, as well as sustainable tourism practices to have a positive effect on the environment (Hall M. et al., 2020). The DMO shared the strategy for the year of 2020-2021 where it could be seen that their main objectives are (Appendix B):

- Focus more on the customers that have been loyal before the pandemic

- Search for new customers (those that had good results despite the crisis, whose activity has increased because of the crisis, emerging companies, and those that promote a sustainable environmental approach)

- Build network and loyalty within.

As well, in the strategy could be seen the fact that the DMO will firstly focus on the regional market, and further it will try to attract more foreign partners and customers. A challenge that the DMO shared in the interview is that there are too many competitors, a lot of destinations will promote themselves, adding that "we have to be able to stand out even more, especially when we have such a beautiful nature that surrounds us" (Appendix A5, Q.8). The Tourism Office came up with a concept to promote Chamonix as a destination, 'Village Vacances Grandeur Nature' aims to offer free outdoor activities to families or couples or singles that stay more than 3 days in the Valley. They have implemented this concept in the summer of 2020, and it was a hit, attracting more people and injecting revenue into the cashflow of the stakeholders while promoting the destination (Appendix A5, Q. 5).

It is talked that changes to tourism due to COVID-19 will be uneven in space, time, and social imbalance and some destinations will focus more on local and sustainable tourism, but they will need the full implications from the government and stakeholders in order to succeed. A scholar believes that destinations will fight to rapidly 'bounce back' but they should consider motivating for a 'slow' and more local tourism that will focus on supporting the minority owned tourism businesses and encourage for social and spatial equity in tourism. The changes that need to happen in this industry should involve the policy makers to protect the livelihoods of the tourism workers and the communities involved, rather that exploit them in the post-pandemic recovery for financial gains (Benjamin S., et al., 2020). Hall 2020 argues that there are not enough stakeholders that believe in sustainability as a transformational change, and he claimed that after the pandemic tourism will be viewed as 'business-as-usual' with not too many changes (Hall M. et al., 2020). However, Zabihi 2021 predicts that there will be changes post COVID-19, and the quality will be much more important than the quantity of the tourists (it is important to state that the DMO of Chamonix supports this idea, as well as a respondent "I think that tourism should change in terms of type and quality, more than quantity" (Appendix A3, Q.9). Moreover, mass tourism will suffer, and people will be more likely to travel less but spend more time and money at one destination (Zabihi S. M. G., & Hokmabadi S. H., 2021).

As Higgins-Desbiolles 2020 stated, there is some hubris in trying to create an analysis based on a global crisis when it has not yet entirely unfolded (Higgins-Desbiolles F., 2020). On one hand, it

is clear for everyone that we are going through a period with major changes, but on the other, it is unclear whether we should be optimistic or depressed regarding this crisis and the immediate changes. A respondent stated that "I do not believe there will ever be a going back to normal if this government oppression continues" (Appendix A1, Q.4). While another respondent affirmed that "I think the demand is still there and things will return to 'normal' relatively quickly once travel restrictions are lifted around Europe and the rest of the world. There may be some caution though, so I think we will see an increased number of French and European visitors, and perhaps less from more distant countries" (Appendix A2, Q.14). Even the DMO has stated that the effects of the pandemic are not over yet, and they are likely to be here for several more months until the recovery measures are put in place (Appendix A5, Q.11).

Teoh S. (2020) affirms that COVID-19 presents an opportunity for the tourism sector to pause and reconsider what it really wants, the chance to not only focus on the economic part but also consider the socio-cultural and environmental aspects of the industry (Brouder P. & Teoh S., et al., 2020). Following the previous statements, some researchers asked themselves the meaning of 'normal', Ateljevic pointed out that there was never a 'normal' and people were just used with a 'normalized' way of perceiving and doing things. She also added that we should instigate for new ways of being, becoming conscious consumers, travelers, entrepreneurs, and just good community members in order to rebuild a 'regenerative tourism' (Ateljevic I., 2020). Lapointe D. (2020) mentioned that at this point, the post-pandemic world could be redefined through tension and a wish to 'go back to normal' as well as a non-acceptance of what could actually be called a new normal (Brouder P. & Teoh S., et al., 2020).

Teoh S. (2020) have addressed a safety scenario that will most likely be real in the post-pandemic world, he mentioned that the tourist' movements may be restricted to those that have received a vaccine and those that are not yet immune. Thus, he raised the question if the governments will impose a health passport that travelers will need to carry in order to travel freely (Brouder P. & Teoh S., et al., 2020). Not too long afterwards, the president of France has announced the need of a certificate with a QR code, which will be scanned into an app, serving as a 'health pass' for travel and leisure. Simultaneously, the European Union is working on its own app, the 'digital green pass' that will be launched in June (TheLocalFr, 2021). However, according to Forbes, many experts are concerned with the logistics and equity of this vaccine passport, they mentioned that

this passport could turn away the progress that has been done in order to reduce global inequity and could rise division among many countries highlighting the wealth aspect in accessing the vaccines. While the logistical problems could be overcome, the ethical problems are harder to get over with (Cohen J., 2021).

UNWTO stated that tourism has a history of bouncing back, however with the COVID-19 crisis things seems to be different. While tourism will recover at some point, the new normal is going to be different than everyone knows. This is mostly due to the fact that tourism is dependent on a person-to-person contact but with the pandemic and the nature of the virus of easily spreading some things will have to change (Hussain A. & Fusté-Forné F., 2021). For instance, technology has been a major force in creating flexibility in the tourism sector, as crisis and disasters are known to speed the changes in technology. There have been robots replacing people, applications on mobile phones to track people that have COVID-19, with artificial intelligence businesses could reduce costs and enhance flexibility, also, maintain social distance (Sharma G. D. & Thomas A. & Paul J., 2021). Many scholars state that transformations are required to happen, to restart and reorganize the revival of the tourism and leisure industry. The current time is the most suitable one to promote a sustainable and equitable tourism industry. Moreover, there comes the opportunity to not only regain the travel and tourism industry but to also reform and repair this sector in meaningful ways (Benjamin S., et al., 2020).

Thus, it is just a matter of time till when we are going to see the real face of the pandemic, and only then we will be able to fully judge what are the impacts that it had on our lives. As Hall M. (2020) affirmed, COVID-19 pandemic showed us that tourism is not what really matters, but the real value lays in the planet, people, and our families (Brouder P. & Teoh S., et al., 2020).

Conclusion

The aim of this research master thesis was to explore how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected locals' lives of a small community from the Chamonix Valley. To do this, it was uncovered the impact of tourism on the destination itself, from two perspectives, on one hand - how tourism has developed and contributed remarkably to the economic growth of the region and created jobs for the locals, but on the other hand how the Chamonix Valley has suffered from overtourism, overcrowding, pollution, heavy traffic, rise in prices and housing and the most important the segmentation of the community.

The study has identified the aspects that lay in the community division and how the community perceive itself. It unveiled the division between the residents that call themselves 'Chamoniards' and the 'foreign locals' that did not integrate fully into the community either because of the lack of desire to adopt the language and the culture of the region or by disinterest of the French people to accept them. Further, it has been shown that with the current pandemic many businesses have been out of work and a high number of people have remained unemployed, with most receiving help from the state. Some have been lucky to adapt, encountering advantages afterwards while others are still dependent on the help from the state. Some did not encounter any changes during the pandemic while for others the life has been a real chaos lately.

Another point that has been touched is how the pandemic has raised the inequalities and inequities within our society, how many groups that were economically deprived have become even more vulnerable to the crisis. Nonetheless, it showed that the crisis was the leading point in engaging and re-engaging of many communities, showing solidarity towards the locals.

Moreover, it has been discussed how the post-pandemic world will look like, how it will be uneven in space, time, and social inequalities for the destinations and how the governments together with the local stakeholders should work together and protect the livelihoods and the wellbeing of the local communities. How the 'new normal' is going to be, and the need to change and become responsible and conscious consumers, travelers, and just good community members.

The research paper views the pandemic as a time to act and change towards a sustainable and slow tourism, in putting an accent on the quality rather than quantity.

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