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"LET US FLY YOU WHERE THE SUN IS": AIR TRAVEL AND TOURISM IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE
Today, 700 million international arrivals are registered around the world, two thirds of these arrivals for ‘purposeless’ tourist travel. Europe’s Mediterranean beaches alone attract around 100 million sun worshippers.

This gigantic migration is only conceivable on the basis of an industrialisation of travel: organisation, lodging, and transportation require elaborate logistical planning and technology. It is commonly thought that aviation was the cause of the victorious march of mass tourism.  

The aeroplane did in fact make it possible for us to reach almost any point on the globe in a few hours; put more critically, ‘Man has reached the limits of his cage’.

However, this conclusion was already reached by the French geographer Jean Brunhes in 1909. Although mass air travel was still unimaginable, and holiday vacations were still a privilege limited to the upper echelons of society, this was the dawn of mass tourism. In Great Britain, the beaches of Blackpool and Brighton thus drew hundreds of thousands on good days, and German seaside resorts claimed almost one million vacationers and visitors; Switzerland registered a total of over 20 million foreign overnight stays. The transportation required for this was achieved with the railroad. In terms of the relation between tourism and aviation, two precisely opposite causal links are conceivable: either the aeroplane helped mass tourism to achieve its breakthrough – or mass tourism guaranteed the breakthrough for the aeroplane.

The ‘Heroic’ Age of Aviation

It would be an entirely different question to explore the relations between aviation and war. For our purposes, we must be satisfied with the remark that World War I brought an enormous push of innovation in flight technology and also instigated an awareness of the strategic importance of the air. The popularity of air travel was promoted by the so-called ‘ace pilots’, those flyers who during the war were able to down more than four planes, like the ‘Red Baron’, Manfred von Richthofen.

The Daredevil Years of Air Travel

Although the Treaty of Versailles not only forced Germany to make very high retribution payments, but also forbade an air force and limited aeroplane construction, it ultimately served to promote entrepreneurial endeavours in the area of aeronautics. Numerous pilots bought military planes in order to try their luck as stunt airmen or to begin a flight service. Around 30 companies specialising in flight were active in post-war Germany. The airline industry began to blossom, even if until 1926 most aeroplanes had to be manufactured abroad. The first airline in Germany was opened in 1919. The Deutsche Luft-Reederei (DLR) transported politicians like President Ebert and files from Berlin to the National Assembly in Weimar, where the deputies negotiated the Treaty of Versailles. This gigantic migration is only conceivable on the basis of the air. The popularity of air travel was promoted by the so-called ‘ace pilots’, those flyers who during the war were able to down more than four planes, like the ‘Red Baron’, Manfred von Richthofen. The transportation required for this was achieved with the railroad. In terms of the relation between tourism and aviation, two precisely opposite causal links are conceivable: either the aeroplane helped mass tourism to achieve its breakthrough – or mass tourism guaranteed the breakthrough for the aeroplane.

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Until 1940, the number of deaths sank to one in every 0.4 million km in 1926 to one in every 2.9 million km in 1931. Sources: Wulf Bley, Die Wirkung der Luftfahrt auf Kunst und Kultur der Moderne, Vienna and New York, 1927. Until 1940, the number of deaths sank to one in every 0.4 million km in 1926 to one in every 2.9 million km in 1931. Sources: Wulf Bley, Die Wirkung der Luftfahrt auf Kunst und Kultur der Moderne, Vienna and New York, 1927.

Despite the risks, as early as 1920 air routes dedicated solely to tourist travel, began operation in Germany and in the US from Miami to sinful Havana or from Berlin to the seaside resort Usedom. Germany, highly interested in a civil aviation ‘air policy’ that helped to mitigate the limitations entailed by the Versailles treaty, was also one of the initiators of the IATA, the International Air Traffic Association, founded in 1919. The first international connection, however, was established in 1920 by the Koninklijke Luchtvaart Maatschappij voor Nederland en Kolonien (KLM) between Amsterdam and London. But air travel strategists were already thinking far into the future. Since England, France, Holland and other colonial powers had to pursue primarily the establishment of air connections to their distant colonies, Germany was left with the strategic goal of constructing long distant routes to the gaps in the geopolitical system: the Far East and America. At the same time, the goal was also to develop intra-European travel. While many countries, like Hungary, kept their air space closed except for a few ‘flight corridors’, some stretches were already jointly operated by numerous companies in a pool or in joint ventures.

The Junkers press spokesman Friedrich A. Fischer von Poturzyn, a pioneer of ‘the possibilities of air policy’, set the tone in 1925. ‘Air travel is either international – or it is nothing at all!’ But the first task at hand was to put an end to the destructive competition from the national level. Subsidies were cut, and, bowing to pressure from the national government, the two largest carriers firms in Germany, Deutsche Aero Lloyd and Junkers Luftverkehr, fused in 1926, and the Deutsche Luft Hansa AG was born. The name was Fischer von Poturzyn’s creation, and Aero Lloyd’s crane was chosen as the emblem. With stock holdings of 26 percent and re-instituted subsidies, the national government was the most important owner of this new company, which was now to be operated strictly in accordance with ‘business principles’.

Air policy was of course more than keeping the books; it symbolised the future. ‘One needn’t be a Jules Verne or a Wells to see how soon multi-motor large aeroplanes […] will carry travellers and goods to all countries of the planet, across the blue world of our globe, which has become so small’, the Luft-Hansa director Martin Wronsky effused, and added a prognosis that fatefully would soon be fulfilled: the Germans have recently been described in a brilliant book as a “people without space”. Air travel shows us ways to new space’. But a quite ‘unheroic’ tourism was also to play a crucial role in the operations of the new company; especially the Bäderdienst, or ‘seaside service’, to the North Sea and the Baltic was expanded. The entire network of air routes was 20,000 km; 56,000 passengers were flown on these routes with 162 aeroplanes, two-thirds of all German airline traffic. Foreign destinations included London, Paris, and Malmö. In 1929, the initial dramatic growth in passenger numbers was again on the decline, due to the outbreak of the Depression. Nonetheless, Luft Hansa was still able to invest.

Around 1930, with just over 100,000 passengers German airline travel exceeded the English and the French by three times. Although an airline had already opened in 1914 in Florida, the air craze in America first began in 1927 with Lindbergh’s ingeniously marketed transatlantic flight. The kilometres flown per year were barely higher than those in smaller Germany, the approximately 40,000 km route network only half that of Europe. Now, however, the rapid expansion of the air routes began to take off in the United States. United, Transworld, Eastern, American, and Pan American engaged in a brutal competitive struggle. Preferred by the government, Pan Am took on the leading role in foreign business, especially with Latin America. Around
the world, the more economical all-metal planes began to dominate airline fleets: the Junkers Ju 52 (1932) (003) and the streamlined Douglas DC-3 (1935), which would become the most frequently built aeroplane in the world (007, 008). In Germany, Lufthansa (the one word spelling was introduced in 1933-34) consolidated its position still further. Almost every European country now had its own airline, from the French Air Union (which in 1933 was absorbed by Air France), to British Imperial Airways, the Italian airline SISA, the Belgian state carrier Sabena, Swissair, or the tiny Danish Luftfartselskab. Not least the Soviet Union, on the basis of its own air travel industry, greatly expanded its Aeroflot which in 1937 also took over the German-Russian Deruluft; in 1935 it possessed a network of air routes that stretched over 70,000 km.

The Crane and the Swastika

Like Stalin, Hitler was thrilled by technology and air travel. A sensation in 1932 were the five election campaign tours, on which he flew 35,000 km – high above Germany – while his competitors took the train on the ground. In 1936, Lufthansa proudly advertised its part in helping Hitler to become chancellor with a celebratory publication. In 1932, as it was put it retrospect, ‘the number of special flights grew dramatically, since Lufthansa repeatedly provided the Führer […] the fastest, multi-motor aeroplanes of the time. Through this, it became possible for the Führer and his fellow fighters to carry the National Socialist idea to all regions [Gau] of the Fatherland’.5

The connection to the National Socialists paid off for Lufthansa. When Hermann Göring, once an ace pilot in the First World War and a civilian pilot in Sweden, was named Minister for Aviation, he made Erhard Milch, a member of Lufthansa’s board of directors, his closest associate.6 Little changed in terms of strategy: already before 1933, Lufthansa had been following the ‘same goals in traffic policy and technology’. Able to harvest the foreign political and economic crop that had been sown by the democratic governments in the Weimar Republic, the Nazi regime was not only able to begin building up an air force in 1935, but also encouraged Lufthansa’s policy of expansion. The economy recovered, and the ‘chains of Versailles’ were ‘burst’. In 1934, Hitler held the opening speech at the IATA convention. ‘Flight is victory’, Lufthansa proclaimed.

By this point, all major European cities were connected by airlines, and in North America as well the network became even tighter. After the United States, the ‘Third Reich’ finally achieved the status of an air power,7 and in German civil aviation only Lufthansa could profit from this development. In 1935 it could for the first time cover half of the operating costs through ticket sales; after the elimination of the remaining competitor, the Deutsche Verkehrsflug AG, it held a practical monopoly on the German market with 94 percent of all passengers (1938).8 Lufthansa nonetheless remained highly innovative. Thus, fast domestic connections were established with the small Heinkel He 70 (010), which flew speeds of up to 360 km.9 For long distance routes, however, regular passenger service could only operate over land or with stops on islands. Beginning in 1938, Lufthansa served the route Berlin–Athens–Baghdad–Teheran–Kabul. It took four days to get to Afghanistan, the price of 1300 Reichsmarks included room and board, feeder service, and tips. This geopolitical prestige object would in the following year also fly to Bangkok, but the extension to the ally Japan did not come about due to the outbreak of war. Similar long distance routes were operated by Air France (Paris–Hanoi, Pan Am (San Francisco–Manila), or KLM (Amsterdam–Batavia, now Jakarta) (393). Lufthansa succeeded in establishing a regular connection to South America in 1934 – in cooperation with Air France, and to the annoyance of the United States. The ocean between Gambia and Brazil was bridged with seaplanes and ‘swimming airports’, a complicated system only suited for postal service.10 (011, 012) This was also attempted for longer stretches over the North Atlantic, but never came into use.

Instead, Lufthansa bought into the Zeppelin company to establish a direct connection to New York. The airships LZ 127 ‘like Jules Verne’s Robur the Conqueror, it had circumnavigated the world in 1929) and LZ 129 (013) (248 m in length, the largest airship in the world) now connected Europe and America with regular service. The giants floated across the Atlantic at a leisurely pace of 130 km/h. The impressive technology was matched
by the futuristic interior design, with Bauhaus inspired aluminium furniture in the smoking room (014). The route became a symbol of progress, but soon it would come to symbolise the risks of progress as well. The cool luxury and the peace offered by a 50 hour flight for 1000 RM veiled the carelessness of the operators, that already in the second year of operation – in May 1937 resulted in catastrophe: LZ 129, the Hindenburg, exploded while docking in Lakehurst, New Jersey. Not only the 36 deaths – airship accidents had already resulted in up to 73 deaths – but more the media presence of the accident, the visual power of the fire ball and the dramatic radio reportage, made the Hindenburg into a symbol of technological risks.

Civil Aviation before Take Off

But even without the debacle of Lakehurst, the zeppelin would probably have remained only a brief episode in the history of air travel. A new generation of four-motor land aeroplanes allowed new achievements: the Focke-Wulf Fw 200 Condor, the Boeing 307 Stratoliner and the Junkers Ju 90 episode in the history of air travel. A new generation of aircraft was commissioned to build the airport; once an associate of Ernst Sagebiel, he was later Göring’s architect for Berlin’s monumental Ministry of Aviation, now the Federal Ministry of Finance. The hangars and the area for arrivals and departures are placed along a 1.2 km long arc; the planes can only be accommodated by direct access to the hangars, making it an airport of short distances (017, 018). In the centre, attached to the main hangar on the city side is a spacious terminal hall, which opens onto an impressive plaza. The side facing the city is in a monumental neo-classicist style, whereas from the runway side the building appears as an elegant steel and glass construction. On the roof, spectator stands were planned to hold 80,000 – a truly impressive gateway to the planned European capital ‘Germania’. But like Prora, a structurally similar gigantic Nazi seaside resort on the island of Rügen, the almost completed building was not opened during the Nazi era: it instead served the air force. But even if the architectural style might run contrary to current tastes,’O Tempelhof remains an ingenious solution, the ‘mother of all modern airports’, as Norman Foster put it. 21

Not only did airports become more impressive, passenger comfort also began to come into its own. Already in 1928, Lufthansa introduced ‘flying dining cars’, and an experiment was even made with film screenings during flight. In 1938, the first 20 stewardesses took up service on the Condor, following American models outfitted with a uniform and with sassy sailor’s caps; these first German stewardesses were selected from among 2000 applicants.22 The great interest in this position reflects the prestige of flight. But the everyday life of flying was sobering: long approaches, delays for hours or even days, on board the deafening roar of the engines, headaches and an up and down which made the vomit bag an absolute requirement.23 All of this compounded the already prevalent fear of flying. In fact, the relative risk of death was incomparably higher than that on trains – but the absolute risk was certainly low.24

After a series of accidents in 1936-37, a broad campaign was launched in the United States to make America ‘air-minded’;25 from newspaper ads l:4fraid to America ‘air-minded’:25 from newspaper ads Afraid to fly? and free flights for wives it was known that they were afraid when their husbands used the aeroplane) to ‘Air Babies’ toys, intent to make even the little ones excited about flight,26 counting in 1937 almost 8. Although the danger of explosion was known, the zeppelins were filled with hydrogen, since helium was rare and expensive. LZ 129 would have required almost half of the annual production of helium in the United States. In 1938, Lakehurst was still served Weitsee-Juengling, 24.4 (1938), p. 22, but on Göring’s order the almost complete LZ 130 and the LZ 131 – waiting in the dockyard – were demolished. Since also the British R 101 burned and a number of other airships crashed, the fate of these aircraft were sealed.


21 Quoted by Asendorf, Super Constellation, plane and Raumrevolution, see also Matthias Heinig and Michael Thiele, Lüftungstempel, Berlin, 1999.


24 In fact, the relative risk of death in air travel was around 100 times that of train travel. The estimates are taken from Schamp, Luftverkehrskugraphie, Broichaus, Fifteenth Edition, Volume 7, 1928, Statistisches Bundesamt: Bevölkerung und Wirtschaft, 1937-1938, Stuttgart and München, 1939 in Germany, 460 people died in air accidents in 1937, compared to 1027 in train accidents, the first with 120 million, the latter 51 billion passenger kilometres, which even results in a 200 times greater risk. However, the highest number of traffic fatalities were due to automobile traffic, 3000, or 86 percent of all traffic fatalities (Bibliographisches Institut, Schlag nach, p. 345).


26 Bibliographisches Institut, Schlag nach, p. 398, Schamp, Luftverkehrskugraphie, p. 9; see also Seifert, Der deutsche Luftverkehr, pp. 344 f. Around the world, 2-4 million passengers were flown.
luxury, and fashion, into a global society without borders. In May 1939, an English magazine put it: ‘In these days of international tension and alarm it is really quite heartening to read the summer timetables of the regular air services. Most companies might easily have used “Forget the Frontiers” as a slogan.’

Technologically quite advanced, air travel served as a screen onto which more sweeping social fantasies were projected. Airmindedness was neither only a phenomenon of the post-war period, nor was it limited to certain countries. Even if in reality many still avoided the aeroplane, it had long conquered the souls. Fischer von Potzryn had announced the new age, an age of ‘three dimensional politics’. In his view, early humanity had only known one dimensional ‘street routes’, a thousand years ago the two-dimensional ‘area’ was added; today, however, with the ‘ocean of the air’, a further quantum leap had been made. This notion of a ‘spatial revolution’ was by no means new. One hundred years prior, the poet and journalist Ludwig Reillstab had celebrated the destruction of ‘all spaces and times’ by the steam locomotive. The railroad pioneer Friedrich List saw in it a ‘Hercules in the crib that will redeem the peoples of the world from the plague of war’. The railroad would overcome the ‘hate of rations’ and take even the ‘lowest’ to ‘far-away beaches’. Those were precisely the same hopes and expectations that now were tied to the aeroplane.

With the attack on Poland on 1 September 1939, these hopes were burst; aviation was placed in the service of war. A fundamental innovation was the jet engine, which in 1939 was tested in the Heinkel He 178, and in 1944 came to be used in the Messerschmitt fighter jet Me 262. But such ‘miracle weapons’ were not decisive for the war. Although the German aviation industry remained technologically more advanced in many ways, its capacities remained limited. While in 1944, 40,000 planes were built, in the United States alone 96,000 were produced. Ignoring all warnings, the production was long suppressed on orders from Hitler and Göring; a devastating bombing war was not part of their scenarios. On the wings of the success of his Stukas on the fronts, air force chief Göring in 1940 emphasised that ‘you could call me Jones’ if ever an
37 In 1917-18, a few individual bombing raids were flown. But it took until the 1930s for bomber fleets to be built up, and in Italian, Japanese, and German military targeted them against the civilian population. With the outbreak of World War II, it became clear that this doctrine was being applied in practice.

Trust in the success of the 'Blitzkrieg' strategy was shattered. See Erhard Kiss, ed., Der luftkrieg Ober Deutschlond 1939-1945, Munich, 1963. The ‘high’ doctrine became a ready means of air war against the German civilian population. In the civilian population that HovelS over, the horror had returned to its originators.

Two years later, the ‘Third Reich’ sank in ash and rubble: enemy plane would fly over the borders of Germany. The ‘Third Reich’ sank in ash and rubble: enemy plane would fly over the borders of Germany. Two years later, the ‘Third Reich’ sank in ash and rubble: enemy plane would fly over the borders of Germany. Two years later, the ‘Third Reich’ sank in ash and rubble: enemy plane would fly over the borders of Germany. Two years later, the ‘Third Reich’ sank in ash and rubble: enemy plane would fly over the borders of Germany.

The Golden Age of Air Travel

While in the aftermath of World War I, the so-called chivalrous age of air jousts could flow into a sporty image of flying, now Anglo-American area bombing had robbed flying of all its optimistic, progressive innocence. Nonetheless, a rapid and fundamental suppression of the destructive side of flight set in after World War II. The next two decades thus became the golden age of civil aviation, directly picking up on the heroic phase from the inter-war period and ultimately culminating in the normalisation of flight.

This era was also the beginning of the ‘American century’ (H. R. Lucas) — of course counteracted by the Soviet Union, the only power that had spread its colonial realm as a consequence of the war. The charm of the red flags remained limited in comparison to the ‘American way of life’. Besides Coca-Cola, rock and roll, chewing gum, and filtered cigarettes, it was Boeing and Pan Am that symbolised the new age. If World War I finally made the United States a great power, they were now the unquestioned leading power of the West and thus the aeronautics industry as well. This era thus became the golden age of civil aviation, directly picking up on the heroic phase from the inter-war period and ultimately culminating in the normalisation of flight.

To the extent that the safety of passenger planes increased, the fear of flying decreased, and enthusiasm for the newest means of transportation grew. Already in 1945, the number of worldwide passengers had more than doubled in comparison to pre-war years. At the beginning of the 1950s, the number of flights was at its highest level. Nonetheless, only with the advent of the Napa1 bomb in Vietnam was the doctrine of ‘area bombing’ called into question. See Erhard Kiss, ed., Der luftkrieg Ober Deutschlond 1939-1945, Munich, 1963. The ‘high’ doctrine became a doctrine with the British air war against the German civilian population. In the civilian population that HovelS over, the horror had returned to its originators.

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It was the era of the Lockheed Super Constellation. Since its first flight in 1948, the elegant propeller plane with its spacious accommodations and ultimately with speeds of up to 540 km/h dominated the IATA routes. Passengers were spoiled with extravagant menus and drinks, during the day passengers were free to smoke, and at night the beds were pulled out. Since the prices were fixed, the airlines attempted to outdo each other in terms of service. The price system supported by the national regulation authorities, internationally by the IATA was still entirely kept within a bourgeois-elite model of tourism, which still gave flying an exclusive, polyglot character.

Airline offices, located at the best city addresses, exuded the cool elegance of the most modern interior.
In 1945, the association of airlines was reformed as the International Air Transport Association; in addition there was the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). See Lufthansa Jahrbuch, 1990: 48 ff.


In addition, the French and English expanded their airfields at Tempelhof and Gatow, in 278,000 flights, 2.1 million tons were flown to West Berlin. See Wiachtel, 'Gebuch nach Berlin', pp. 162 ff.

Ayhard Misch also profited from the new tolerance: convicted in 1947 to a life sentence, he was freed in 1954.


Even here, Adenauer was faster: a week before, he had flown with the DLH to Moscow: see Wachtel, 'Gebuch nach Berlin', pp. 162 ff.

On one point, however, the friendship reached its limits: the Americans did not once again want to have their hegemony in air travel challenged by the Germans. While the Japanese were already allowed to found an airline in 1951, the Federal Republic was still forbidden to own and operate aeroplanes. This stipulation was even more strict than the Treaty of Versailles, which otherwise was not supposed to be repeated. Nonetheless, the Federal government prepared to begin the reconstruction of Lufthansa, which had been dissolved in 1945. The company was finally registered in 1953, with the Federal government as main owner; as a precaution, the company was named Aktiengesellschaft für Luftverkehrsbedarf ['Air Travel Services Corporation, or LUFThAG]. A provocative step, but the US aeronautics industry was grateful for new customers, and an agreement was reached on the delivery of Super Constellations and Convairs. When it began to become clear that the USSR was going to allow East Germany to operate and build aeroplanes, the end of the ban had come. In 1954, Luftag again became Deutsche Lufthansa (DLH). However, negotiations with the Western powers allowed only for a special permission for the import of the planes ordered: at first only for training purposes. But for better or worse, the Paris Treaties guaranteed the Federal Republic air sovereignty in 1955, and Lufthansa took up operations (1024). The first flight abroad brought a proud Chancellor Adenauer to Paris. At the same time, two new charter airlines also came onto the scene: ITU and the Deutsche Flugsdiest, which later became the Lufthansa subsidiary Condor.

On the other side of the Iron Curtain, airline operations also began with the Deutsche Lufthansa, the 'socialist traffic company of the GDR' (1025) - not to be confused with the Deutsche Lufthansa AG, the air traffic company dependent on monopolies and closely woven together with German militarism and fascism. On September 1955, a half year after Adenauer’s visit to Paris, Prime Minister Grotewohl flew with the GDR Lufthansa to Moscow. The socialist 'crane' served a number of necessarily quite short domestic flights in 1980 these were ended as well as the most important cities of the Eastern bloc. The disagreement over the names brewed under the surface, bursting out into the open when the two airlines attempted to fly to the same place. Belgrade. When in 1963 the matter came before the Yugoslav courts, the GDR ended the comedy by transferring their Lufthansa to Interflug (1026), which in case had already been founded in 1958.

Like all state airlines, the East German Lufthansa and later Interflug served to promote the country. But
Departing passengers in 1950 from Berlin and Frankfurt in 1960: 0.8 every 1 million; 1970: 3.6 to 4.4 million. See Treibel, Geschichte der deutschen Verkehrsflughäfen, p. 36.

52 Passenger numbers grew from 0.7 million in 1955 to 5.5 million in 1971, but sank as a result of the Berlin Treaty, so that around 1989 again reached 4.5 million. The percentage of air travel in Berlin in 1989 still more than one third. Seifert, Der deutsche Luftverkehr, p. 2.

53 See Spode, Wie die Deutschen Reiseweltmeister wurden.
55 Frankfurt counted in 1951 only 20,000 charter passengers, in 1967 already 0.6 million. See Flugzeitnachrichten, 4 1968/1, p. 41.

the West German Lufthansa was much more successful in this: it acquired a good reputation, and soon was counted as one of the leading European airlines. In the long distance routes, pre-war plans were realised by 1960: the airline now served North and South America as well as the Near and Far East, flying as far as Bangkok. In 1964, Lufthansa achieved profits for the first time. Frankfurt Airport was built up as an international hub, replacing politically isolated Berlin (0231). Lufthansa understood itself as the most important ‘supporter’ of incoming tourism. As a member of the board of directors pointed out, even the name alone developed a ‘general promotional effect’, further supported by the on-board service: the passengers enjoyed ‘German hospitality, be it through serving beer and wine from kegs, be it through typically German meals, of which the Lufthansa soup pot already enjoys great popularity among the American guests’. In 1962, DLH operated 95 city offices abroad, 40 of these in North America alone – in comparison with four official government tourism centres. The Public Relations Division also launched exhibitions, congresses, and festive events. These activities were not solely motivated by economic interests, but also political ones: ‘The most promotion should be done for Berlin, even if Lufthansa cannot serve Berlin.’

Here, the GDR airline had a significant advantage: it could – using Schönefeld Airport, located on the outskirts of Berlin – serve its capital city. The three air corridors to the island of West Berlin in contrast remained restricted to the airlines of the Western powers until reunification. A most profitable business, since a large portion of domestic air traffic went to Berlin. In addition, the air routes, and thus Pan Am, BEA, and Air France, had to be subsidised by the West German federal government. Even the Eastern side profited from this relic of the Occupation Statute: Interflug, which like all Eastern bloc airlines was not a member of IATA, could establish itself among West German tourists and so-called ‘guest workers’ as an affordable, but also excellent, high quality alternative. In 1963, for these purposes a border crossing connecting West Berlin to Schönefeld was set up along the Berlin Wall, which had been built two years prior. Thus, some holiday travellers flew form Hanover to Tempelhof, where they took the transit bus to Schönefeld, where there would then check into their flights to Tunis.

Up, Up, and Away

Interflug increasingly became a charter airline serving the West, and thus relied on an expanding market segment; mass tourism. The social opening of air travel was thus driven from two sides: a sales and a technological aspect. The price policy of the IATA could be circumvented when a tour operator ordered whole ticket contingents from a charter airline along with the hotel beds at the holiday destination. Due to the guaranteed full booking the IATA airlines were only about 60 percent booked, the charter carriers could fly more cheaply. This principle of the inclusive tour (ITI) or ‘all inclusive holiday’ was almost as old as the railroad. In 1841 Thomas Cook had rented his first special train, and with special trains and busses the Nazi organisation Kraft durch Freude had brought serial production in holiday travelling to full blossom.

The Rise of Charter Tourism

Charter flights first became popular in Great Britain, Scandinavia, and West Germany. Now even those with a moderate income in search of relaxation could head for Costa Brava or Majorca. In late 1960s England, the portion of all-inclusive among vacationers had reached around 8 percent. The same share was achieved by the aeroplane as a means of transport in West Germany; here as well, charter flights had grown over-proportionally. Majorca trips – by train and ship – were already offered by Dr Tigges in 1934; starting in 1956, the island was served by charter airlines – at this time, still an expensive pleasure. At the beginning of the 1970s, however, the boom of all-inclusive air holidays began in many countries. In West Germany, the great demand for foreign travel allowed this market to expand especially dramatically; in 1968, for the first time over 50 percent of all holiday journeys went abroad (in Great Britain, as in the GDR, it was only 15 percent). But the car was still the dominant mode of transportation to Austria and Italy. However, with the large tour operators
entering the market in the early 1960s - 'Neckermann macht’s möglich' ('Neckermann makes it possible') was one of the advertising slogans of the time, referring to one of the main charter companies - the foundations for a mass use of air travel for tourism had been laid. By 1970, over half of all German all-inclusive tourists landed in Palma de Mallorca - the picturesque insider’s tip became a 'cleaning ladies island'. At the same time, the good flight connections guaranteed that the wealthy and beautiful settled here as well.

Lufthansa also participated in the business of offering cheap seats with its subsidiary Condor and contracts with non-IATA airlines, like Aeroflot. Not only the airlines of the Eastern bloc countries undermined the IATA system, but also smaller Western state-owned lines, like Loftleidir (now Icelandair), and especially British entrepreneurs, in particular Freddy Laker, whose Skytrain even regularly flew to New York as of 1977. Cheap carriers like Court Line and People’s Express did go bankrupt, but at the same time the trick had become established to issue a fictitious hotel voucher with the ticket, thus legally exempting an IATA flight from the fixed price system. For this the IATA airlines even themselves opened up seats ITX tickets. At the same time driven and profiting from this loosening of the fixed price system, IATA introduced special fares like the APEX ticket of 1975).

But the system of price regulation could no longer be maintained. In the Western capitals, the neo-liberal credo gained the upper hand. At the latest, deregulation in the United States in 1978 marked the beginning of the end of the state airlines with their role as agents of national promotion (airport construction and kerosene of course remained subsidised). One of the first to go bankrupt was the once proud Pan Am, and just recently even Swissair was hit by this fate. But the expansion of air travel proved the policy of liberalisation right - London, the world’s busiest air hub, counted over 85 million passengers at the turn of the millennium, Chicago-O’Hare, which since the 1970s has been the world’s largest airport, over 70 million, and Frankfurt over 40 million. The ‘flavour of the great wide world’ that had earlier been effused by Stuyvesant cigarettes has long been lost in the endless corridors and security checks - not only because smoking is prohibited, and since the 1970s terror attacks have required increasingly more complex security measures, but also because this is the unavoidable price of the democratisation of flying. The ecological costs of this rise in air travel, and whether the retreat of the state from ‘air policy’ is actually in the national interest, are different questions altogether.

Europe, at any rate, was well advised to build up an aeronautics industry under state direction in the 1960s. Today, after the collapse of the Russian aeronautics industry, only Airbus Industries keeps the Boeing-McDonnell-Douglas group from holding a world-monopoly. We thus come to the technological side of mass tourist air travel. Since the Messerschmitt fighter had shown the superiority of the jet propulsion, the British introduced the first passenger jet in 1949, the two-engine Comet (028). Spectacular crashes caused it to fail on the market, but other jet airliners had success beginning in 1954–55, in particular the 900 km/h fast Boeing 707 (027), but also the French Caravelle (030) and the Soviet Tupolev 104 (031). In the 1960s the more efficient jet planes finally pushed out the propeller planes, which went back to the pre-war period. When Lufthansa retired its last Super Constellation from service in 1967, the next generation of jet airliners was already in development, taking off in 1969 and 1972 on their first flights: the Boeing 747 Jumbo Jet (032) for large numbers of passengers and long distances, and the Airbus (033) for medium numbers of passengers and distances. At comparable costs these ‘wide-bodied jets’ could carry twice as many passengers as the jet planes in use up until then. The dam preventing the mass use of air transport for tourist purposes was thus finally broken. At first, the plan had been to use the extra space for luxury-reclining seats, clubrooms, bars, game rooms, etc. But the premonition had by a pessimist already before the first jumbo was in the air would become reality: 490 passengers would be ‘herded in’ like a pack of sheep and all comforts that initially were installed in the early period of enthusiasm would later be removed. Instead of menus cooked in the on-board galleys, there would be ‘soft rolls in plastic foil’, and the rows of seats would be placed as close together as possible.
Conclusion: Interchangeable Destinations

The generation of aeroplanes from around 1970 still dominates the skies today. The supersonic prestige projects of the period, like the Tupolev (1934) and the Concord (1964), long remained a towering leftover from the golden age of flying, well into the time when the aeroplane had already become a 'normal' means of transportation. With the last flight of the Concorde in 2003, the superplane that permanently ran at a loss, the aeroplane had already become a 'normal' means of transportation. With the last flight of the Concorde in 2003, the superplane that permanently ran at a loss, this proud relic of 'airmindedness' was also sent to its grave. Symbolic for both the golden and the 'normal' age of air travel are its most prominent fossils: once the elegant Super Constellation, with its strangely elite sounding name, futurist and global in its reach. Now, the fat and comfy jumbo jet, which allows families to take off for their beach holidays with the greatest ease in its confidence inspiring mammoth tummy.

Today, civil aviation is to a large part dependent on tourism, but mass tourism was by no means a result of air travel. The technological watershed in the history of tourism is much more fundamental: the replacement of muscle power with motors. Steam-driven boats and railroads introduced the truly epochal 'space revolution' which caused mobility to cease being a social privilege. Already Thomas Cook demanded successfully: 'We must have railways for the millions!' The aeroplane has not increased the number of travellers, but only the distances involved.

Nothing demonstrates this more clearly than the comparison between East and West Germany. The travel destinations of GDR citizens were geographically quite limited, while for West Germans the world was open, if the money was available. But the basic structures of tourist travel differed little in the two states. Thanks to state-organised social tourism and the increase in purchasing power, the GDR achieved even a higher intensity of travel than the FRG in the late 1980s - the East Germans had become 'world champions of travel'. But they hardly used the aeroplane, travelling instead by car and train.

The aeroplane did not create any entirely new practices of tourism: the repertoire of holiday travelling was basically set before World War II, with city trips on the one hand and the three S's - sun, sand, and sex - in the de-localised 'south' of the beach holiday on the other. While holiday travellers and advertisers emphasise the 'distinctions' between destinations, in a broader historical framework the shared characteristics are far more revealing. From this perspective it makes no difference whether the trip – as was true already around 1900 – reached Usedom, 'Berlin's bathtub', in two and one half hours, or, as is the case today, in the same time reached Majorca. The Kraft durch Freude project of a mass resort for 20,000 'national comrades' on Rügen was an anticipation of what was realised in the 1960s in Benidorm on the Costa Blanca. By now countless such holiday factories have long been in existence. Already in the 1920s, Siegfried Kracauer spoke of a 'the growing interchangeability of the destination' (Ver gleichgültigkeit des Reiseziels); today, what Kartheinz Wöhler calls 'tourism without distance' has become a reality. The aeroplane has indeed played a decisive part in this, making possible the globalisation of the South, from Thailand to the Dominican Republic. For such countries, tourism has in the meantime become an important economic factor. The loser is in any case the environment due to the increase in transportation, perhaps in the end also travel itself.

The aeroplane as a 'normal' means of mass transportation cannot fulfill its promise of the 'somewhere else' - instead it causes the 'somewhere else' increasingly to disappear. Man has not only 'reached the limits of his cage', but also increasingly designs this cage as a homogenous space, at best marked by differences of a carefully maintained local colour. Already in 1955, Claude Lévi-Strauss darkly noted this: 'Journeys, those magic caskets full of dreamlike promises, will never again yield up their treasures untarnished'. In its heroic and its golden age, the aeroplane was an emissary of the future; it opened the magic caskets wide, only then to fill them with cheap factory products.
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