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Double standards for our onshore and offshore worlds?

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Foreign travel gives people and companies an opportunity to indulge in practices that may not be approved of or even legal back at home. Shouldn't we remember to pack our ethical standards when we go abroad?

The author

JOHN URRY

Transcription

Crucial events and processes that affect people's lives do not simply take place inside a society. People often have experiences that are in some sense elsewhere, such as going on foreign holidays or having family living abroad; or arrive from elsewhere, such as watching TV programmes transmitted from elsewhere, or driving foreign cars.

These experiences are often described through the idea of a more open world with fewer borders. But some of what happens elsewhere is not so open, it's more secretive, more hidden from view. Especially significant is how much manufacturing production has been relocated offshore, where conditions of work are often worse. Much global money moves offshore, with almost all companies and almost all wealthy individuals reducing tax payments by moving income and wealth through tax havens such as Delaware or Dubai.

These are often described as 'secrecy jurisdictions'.

So rather than it being an open world, we might describe this as much more of a secretive world. Likewise pleasures disapproved of at home, or even illegal, may take place offshore, such as gambling. While waste products from industry and households are often sent abroad for other societies to deal with out of sight, astonishing mountains of e-waste, for example, land up in the small Chinese town of Guiyu. So an offshore world has developed, with many companies and rich individuals living what we might call offshore life. Secrecy and not openness is what distinguishes offshore guys and their offshore lives. We need to reverse offshoring and start a programme of onshoring.

Keywords : [Border](#), [Economic development](#)



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British sociologist John Urry (1946-2016) was Distinguished Professor at Lancaster University. He was co-founder and director of the Centre for Mobilities Research from 2004 to 2015 and, in 2015, he co-founded the Institute for Social Futures. He wrote seminal mobilities texts such as *Sociology Beyond Societies and Mobilities*.

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