Report on initial approach and discussions to the guiding questions for WP3 Tourism Group on COVID-19

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Main challenges regarding Antarctic tourism in light of COVID-19

In order to ascertain the main challenges facing Antarctic tourism in light of COVID-19 we have prepared a SWOT analysis that could provide insights on the potential effects of COVID-19 on tourism operations and management and could lead the future work of the WP3.

STRENGTHS

1. Decrease of human impact (i.e. trampling, wildlife disturbance, risk of introduction of alien species etc.) due to reduction in tourist numbers and visits (i.e., landings).
2. Recovery of ecological habitats at visiting sites that were subject to intensive visitation.
3. Recovery of ecological processes (e.g. breeding success, recovery of damaged vegetation cover, etc.) at visitor sites that were subject to intensive visitation.
4. Better visitor experience for Antarctic tourists with a stronger perception of isolation and wilderness.
5. Increased options to visit more sites in the same area (e.g. Deception Island or King George Island) due to lower probabilities of coinciding with other tourist cruises).
6. More relaxed and longer visits due to the absence of cruises interested in visiting the same area/site.
7. A short-term reduction of carbon emissions and sewage and solid waste production due to reduced cruise activities (at least for the coming season or two).

WEAKNESSES:

1. Altered trip modalities and itineraries to those expected or desired by prospective tourists.
2. Lower numbers of prospective tourists willing to travel due to the COVID-19 situation particularly in Latin America.
3. Difficulties in logistics and with insurance when travelling abroad to join tours.
4. Fewer opportunities to develop extra activities due to the existence of a maximum number of participants per activity.
5. Increase of tourist expenses (e.g., less services for more or the same amount of money compared to past seasons).
6. Compromised tourist experience and learning outcomes due to precautionary measures implemented on ships and reduced/eliminated opportunities for landings.
7. Fewer opportunities to visit some sites and stations to lower risks of COVID-19 transmission to staff.
8. Loss of income for tour operators, mooring ports, and gateway cities, particularly in Ushuaia and Punta Arenas.
9. Economic difficulties dealing with investments on recently chartered or constructed ships.
10. Potential bankruptcy of some tour operators and associated companies.
11. Loss of jobs both for the crew of the ships and for those running associated activities and shops in city ports.
12. Increased risks/stress for crew and staff because of higher risk of exposure and increased workload (for some) because of hygiene safety measures.
13. Potential difficulties related to ship crew and staff recruitment for next season due to the experiences of crew and staff stranded on ships for months and in poor conditions.
14. Potential economic difficulties for IAATO due to changes in the number of operators for the upcoming seasons.
15. Less presence of Antarctic coverage in the media. Related to this, the ambassadorial function that tourism can fulfill could be compromised.

16. Negative image of Antarctic tourism due to media reporting of incidents during COVID, e.g. with the *Greg Mortimer*.
17. Fewer opportunities for research or citizen science projects due to reduced logistical support from tourist ship operations and altered itineraries.
18. Compromised long term datasets, like Penguin Watch and Happy Whale which depend on the tourism industry to take researchers to sites and collect data for citizen Science projects.

OPPORTUNITIES

1. Possibility of designing impact monitoring plans for analyzing the recovery capacity of key indicators at specific visitor sites.
2. Possibility of acquiring stronger and permanent commitment from IAATO members (logistically, financially, visitor education programming integration, etc.) for implementing long-term monitoring protocols with participation or validation by external collaborating researchers as a part of the requirements in tourism recovery plans.
3. Opportunities for operators to market to citizens of specific countries that have been less impacted by COVID-19 (eg Australia, New Zealand) and to promote a new model of tours that do not mix people from many geographical areas on one vessel.
4. Potential revision of the current Antarctic tourism model before the annual number of visitors recovers or grows again. This could include 1) modality and itinerary options, 2) desired group size/capacity according to sites characteristics, 3) spatial and temporal patterns of visitation and landing, 4) development of further Site Specific Guidelines.
5. The post COVID-19 era could provide a chance to educate people who are not yet interested in Antarctic protection by providing more information about the region. There are potentially greater opportunities to visit through the development of new tourism products and the opening up of new market segments.
6. Public perception and satisfaction of the protection and ecological recovery of Antarctica during the pandemic.
7. Incentives for innovations in cruise ship design (cabins, corridors, ventilations, etc.) that enhance health and well-being and/or reduce probability of transmission of contiguous diseases (COVID-19 and others). These innovations may result in new industry standards in the future.

THREATS

1. COVID-19could reach Antarctic bases (especially permanent) generating a significant impact on the logistical staff and researchers.
2. Potential for human to animal transmission of COVID-19 which unknown impacts on them (especially during the breeding season).
3. The cruise operations are perhaps one of the tourist sectors that would have the most difficult recovery, both for being very small spaces with high index of virus transmission and because of the quarantine rules they may have to apply.
4. Long-term effects of COVID-19 (more than one season) that could compromise the continuity of smaller cruises (e.g., IAATO tour operations) while opening the possibility for a greater number of larger vessels in the region.
5. Increase of cruise-only activities in Antarctica as the only modality for visiting, which could increase the potential of accidents and fuel spills and the risks associated with these.
6. Potential aggressive post-COVID-19 marketing or discounts by tour operators/travel agents to regain business that would lead to influx of tourists of different profiles and motivations inconsistent with learning and other outcomes advocated by IAATO (and other organizations).
7. Potentially decrease the ambassadorial effect.

8. Abandonment of activity in Antarctica by companies with a long tradition and interest in conservation.
9. Long-term (more than one season) closure of ports and gateway cities in Argentina and Chile, although in other countries the COVID-19 situation has been recovered or controlled.
10. In a future and uncertain scenario in which big cruise ships (500+ pax) are off the market because of health risks in big numbers of people sharing a confined space, and in which instead smaller and more manageable ships (100-200 pax) are favored, numbers of landing passengers would increase with concomitant environmental risks.
11. Increased attractiveness of Antarctica as a destination due to its strong association with purity, dovetailing with its status as the only COVID-19-free continent.
12. Certain tourism products involving very small group sizes may be favored. Yachts and sailboats could have a greater business niche among families or groups of friends who contract this service in exclusive which could complicate even more the management and control of these operations.

Research interests regarding the WP3 proposal

Considering the SWOT analysis results and additional exchange, some of the agreed and prioritized research interests of the WP3 are focus on:

Operational side:

- Better understanding of how passenger composition will change, depending on how the situation develops (incl. border and travel restrictions). Hot-spot nationalities might decrease on trips, while operators might concentrate on more homogenous groups (as is currently happening in Europe with Arctic operations).
- Analysis of the effects of COVID-19in the 2019-2020 season and the forecasts of impact and change in operations for the season 2020-2021 (and beyond).

Policy and permitting:

- In-depth analysis of the environmental effects that COVID-19 may trigger in the biophysical dimensions of tourist visit sites.
- Definition of future scenarios: implications for post-COVID-19 tourism operations (e.g., changes in organization of itineraries and landings, new prior biosecurity measures and during the visit, visit restrictions, quarantines).

Perceptions:

- How has Antarctica been portrayed in relation to COVID-19 media coverage, particularly coverage that deals with tourism? How has COVID-19 altered popular depictions of the continent?
- Can representations of Antarctica (eg. In the media) have an ambassadorial function? Is there evidence of any difference between on the ambassadorial effect of cruise-only and other passengers visiting Antarctica?

Approaches proposed to the different research interests of WP3

We consider it a matter of importance to invite representatives from the policy arena (or even competent authorities) as they would bring helpful insights regarding policy movements and permitting. The same applies for COMNAP in terms of operations. These connections could add further depth to the report and conclusions.

Recognising IAATO as an important stakeholder in the Antarctic tourism space, WP3 has invited IAATO to be part of the discussions and provide insights to the work we are developing.

As a way to operationalize the work and provide precise inputs into the different topics we decided to form three thematic sub groups in order to make communications and discussions more effective.

Thematic area	**Includes** (but not limited to):	**Research participants**
Impacts on Antarctic operations	Changing practices, safety, availability of vessels, impact of global economy	Andrea Herbert, Daniela Cajiao, Gabriela Roldan, Karen Alexander
Policy and permitting	Environmental procedures, government responses, corporate sustainability and responsibility	Valentina Dinica, Daniela Portella Sampaio, Javier Benayas, Pablo Tejedo, Yu-Fai Leung, Jasmine Lee, Hanne Nielsen
Perceptions of Antarctica	Media coverage, how is Antarctica narrated in times of a pandemic, marketing on Antarctic tourism	Elizabeth Leane Karen Alexander Hanne Nielsen Gabriela Roldan

Additional ideas proposed

<u>The precautionary principle of regulation and operational management</u>

COVID-19 brought to the fore the importance of the precautionary principle of decision making and operational management, including in the context of the future of Antarctic tourism. WP3 could investigate options for the (explicit) incorporation of the precautionary principle in:

- The Guide for the Preparation of Management Plans for ASPAs, adopted in the implementation of the 1998 environmental protocol)
- Revised versions of management plans for ASPA/ASMA and concessions for tourism operators in and around protected areas. Are there / should there be changes in how national authorities competent to issue tourism permits for visits in ASPA, as a result of biosecurity risk associated with COVID-19?
- The adoption of spatial planning tools in the implementation of the "systematic environmental-geographic framework for ASPA designation". This could also utilize the concept of quotas/ boundaries in space and time for tourism volumes and activity types
- The potential use of Strategic Environmental Assessments both outside and within ASPA, ASMA, (an approach that has been previously proposed, but is not yet reflected in regulations)

- EIA policies and studies for tourism operations outside ASPAs and ASMAs. Previous studies indicate that the type of studies carried out are often not representative of the magnitude and possible impacts of activities. Research could examine the application of the precautionary principle for all types of EIA studies to capture early when an inadequate 'level' is chosen

Kees Bastmeijer and Ricardo Roura suggest the precautionary principle can be operationalized both in terms of generic conditions and specific regulations for specific types of tourism activities or locations or timeframes. They did a generic analysis of 40 of the total of 70 ASPA management plans. This working package could update the few that accommodate tourism and also examine the other 30.

A focus on the precautionary principle offers ample opportunity to also examine **interplays between scientific inputs, discourses or narratives** following particular pattern and storylines - and precautionary regulatory design and management monitoring and enforcement practices. There are opportunities for colleagues with expertise in narrative/discourse analysis to join this research theme. It is also extremely important for colleagues interested in operational aspects of tourism and could serve as useful bridge across all 3 themes in the work package.

Kees Bastmeijer and Ricardo Roura have done incredibly important work in these areas and concluded based on comprehensive and sophisticated analysis that currently the precautionary principle is only applied to the very limited extent by International bodies, national authorities and through industry self-regulation in Antarctica. However, there are many as yet unanswered questions, and existing publications are already 10 to 15 years old. WP3 is well placed to address this contemporary research challenge.

Corporate Sustainability and Responsibility / CSR 2.0

- How do/should IAATO Guidelines, monitoring protocols and enforcement provisions change in response to biosecurity and COVID-19 risks? IAATO invoked the precautionary principle when they lifted the quota per ship above 400 “unless further scientific an aesthetic evidence provides otherwise."
- What are the (potential) COVID-19 implications for changes in the ATCM Resolution 4 Guidelines on contingency planning, insurance and other matters for tourists and other non-governmental activities in the Antarctic treaty area?
- How do tourism operators revise their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategies and operational practices in the light of COVID-19?

Narrative and discourse analyses

- How do stakeholders design their narrative or discourse strategies to promote particular regulatory and operational changes or to fight proposals inconsistent with their interests and preferences?

Research designs

In terms of research designs, these could blend original conceptual work with stakeholder inputs based on both a widespread survey and in-depth interviews.

Note that discussions will be held within the sub groups as to the most appropriate research methods to pursue the questions posed.

Proposed outputs:

- *Report for SCAR*
- *Peer-reviewed articles addressing key questions*
- *Public-facing article outlining key challenges associated with Antarctic Tourism and COVID-19*