Key Issues for a Strategic Approach to Review Tourism Policies
IP 55

Key Issues on a Strategic Approach to Review Tourism Policies

Information Paper submitted by ASOC

Abstract

This information paper examines key issues that are relevant for a strategic review of Antarctic tourism including supervision of tourism, the development of new international regulatory instruments or guidelines, and environmental aspects and impacts of Antarctic tourism. The paper concludes that increased supervision of tourism, through inspections or other means, is necessary to match the scale of this activity. In addition, some aspects of tourism, particularly expansion, diversification and new site occupation, which are mutually interlinked, should be addressed in a proactive manner through legally binding regulation. Finally, identifying tourism impacts requires additional monitoring efforts that should be paid for by Parties, the industry, consumers, and/or some forms of partnership. If the ATCPs fail to address tourism within a reasonable time frame, the chances are that tourism will continue its dynamic trajectory and the Antarctic values the 1991 Protocol aims to protect will be placed in jeopardy.

Introduction

In 2009 ATCM XXXII adopted Resolution 7 (2009) General Principles of Antarctic Tourism, which paves the way for addressing tourism from a more strategic perspective. In 2011 ATCM XXXIV agreed that it was highly desirable to take a more strategic approach to the ATCM’s review of tourism policies, to identify gaps, and to set priorities for future discussion, taking into account existing regulatory instruments and guidelines and the implementation thereof. The Meeting agreed that ATCM XXXV would discuss further work related to tourism with the aim of agreeing to key priorities.

Based on that earlier discussion (as summarized in Antarctic Treaty Secretariat Circular 13/2012) and with a view to contribute to tourism discussions during XXXV ATCM, this Information Paper examines three topics:

- Supervision of Antarctic tourism;
- Issues for which it may be appropriate to develop new international regulatory instruments or guidelines; and
- Environmental aspects and impacts of Antarctic tourism.

For each of these topics ASOC proposes specific actions, based on earlier submissions made to ATCPs.

Supervision of Antarctic tourism

ASOC raised the issue of inspections of tourism activities at the Antarctic Treaty Meeting of Experts on Shipborne Tourism (ASOC 2009) and subsequently at ATCM XXXIII (ASOC 2010). Overall, ASOC noted the mismatch between the increase and diversification of tourism, on the one hand, and the limited number of official inspections focused on tourism, on the other hand. ASOC has consequently participated in intersessional work led by Argentina on the supervision of Antarctic tourism (2010-2011 and 2011-2012), and is in general agreement with the conclusions of that work, summarised in XXXIV ATCM/WP048 (Argentina 2011).

Inspections have the potential to provide useful information about the on-ground conduct of activities, which will supplement (but not be a substitute for) information obtained from other sources (detailed in Argentina 2011: 5). This includes aspects of tourism operations and tourist behavior (both the typical and the atypical)

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1Lead author: Dr. R. M. Roura with comments by Jim Barnes, Claire Christian, Lyn Goldsworthy, Dr. Rodolfo Werner and other ASOC colleagues.
regarding modus operandi and compliance with existing regulations. This information can result in recommendations for the management of specific sites and/or the conduct of tourism as a whole.

The Intersessional Contact Group recognized the importance of inspection and observation schemes for tourism, while noting that their implementation poses challenges for National Antarctic Programs. In ASOC’s view the characteristics of tourism, while different from those of other operations, should not be seen or used as an impediment for the conduct of inspections of tourism activities. For instance, while tourism is an essentially mobile activity, there are several sites regularly visited by tour operators and thus where tourism operations would be readily accessible for inspection, such as Whalers Bay in Deception Island. There are a handful of sites regularly used as yacht mooring sites (e.g. Port Lockroy) where observers could be able to inspect them. The cooperation of IAATO and of competent authorities would be useful to identify and locate tourism operations by IAATO and non-IAATO members.

Overall, there would seem to be no substantive impediment to conduct inspections of tourism activities, other than what is common to all inspections: allocating human and financial resources, and making suitable logistic arrangements. Although not essential, a dedicated checklist would facilitate inspections of tourism activities, and ASOC remains supportive of the development of such by ATCPs. In addition, an on-board observer regime, as already used by some Parties, could also be used to obtain information on tourism activities. This would not necessarily mean that every cruise of every tourist ship would carry an observer in each expedition, but rather that this is done with a frequency that is sufficient to gather the required information and is logistically feasible for both Parties and tour operators.

**Tourism issues that require new international regulatory instruments**

**Overview of tourism regulation**

Tourism developments in the Antarctic Treaty Area have taken place in the absence of a comprehensive regulatory regime. The regulations that have emerged over the past two decades include generic instruments (primarily the Protocol); a large number of hortatory Resolutions; four legally binding Measures, including Annexes V and VI of the Protocol, three of which are not yet in force; and Recommendation XVIII-1 (Kyoto, 1994), which has not yet become effective. This is complemented by self-regulation by IAATO, which represents a vast segment of the industry, but which is not binding or comprehensive. The regulation of Antarctic tourism has lagged behind the developments of tourism, beyond the proliferation of hortatory Resolutions, and it is past the time when Parties should adopt more substantive regulation.

To regulate a large and inherently dynamic industry, legally enforceable standards are required. Guidelines – adopted through hortatory Resolutions – can be used on interim bases prior to the adoption of legally binding instruments and provide guidance for future regulation (such as Resolution 7, 2009), but cannot provide an adequate basis for regulation of commercial tourism. In this context, ASOC has recommended:

- Making key legally binding instruments that are still not still fully in force effective as soon as possible;
- Moving from non-binding to binding regulation in implementing the general principles of Resolution 7 (2009) by means of Measures;
- Identifying and addressing gaps in existing tourism regulation and making them also subject to Measures;
- Reviewing and improving how environmental impact assessment obligations are applied to tourism activities; and
- Using ASPAs and ASMAs proactively as a strategic tourism management tool.

Overall, there is nothing in the Antarctic Treaty that stops the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties from tackling this issue in the comprehensive manner required.

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2 That is, the individuals designated to carry out official inspections under Art. VII of the Antarctic Treaty.

3 The Antarctic Treaty Secretariat website (www.ats.aq) lists all the Parties whose approval is needed for these various Measures to enter into effect.
Key issues that require further regulation

For over a decade ASOC has examined strategic issues regarding Antarctic tourism in a number of Information Papers submitted to the ATCM (most recently in ASOC 2007, 2008, 2009b, 2009c, and 2011). In several of these papers it has identified specific issues concerning Antarctic tourism that require new international regulatory instruments. Common issues of concern through these papers include, but are not limited to:

- Increase, expansion and diversification of tourism: growing numbers of tour operators, ships, tourists, landing sites; the expansion of tourism into new regions of Antarctica where there has not been tourism before; diversification of activities; and greater development of activity-based tourism (rather than location-based tourism, focused on attractions such as wildlife or historic sites);
- Increase in pressure on existing sites coupled with the establishment of new destinations, and the consolidation of hitherto little visited destinations;
- Penetration of the Antarctic particularly inland away from coastal areas; establishment of staging sites from where activities penetrate into new tourism areas; related to this, the use of new transport modalities (fly-sail, air-based, land-based) and the development of land-based tourism;
- Involvement of Parties as tour operators or providers of essential logistics, particularly with respect to land-based tourism; possibility of state-sponsored tourism; “cross pollination” between tour operators and national Antarctic programs;
- Absence of precautionary approaches to address tourism in the context of tourism increase, lack of knowledge about direct, indirect and cumulative impacts of tourism, and absence of effective monitoring mechanisms at most tourist sites;
- Use of vessels of any size that lack the ice-strengthening and other characteristics needed to protect them under the difficult Antarctic conditions, including very large capacity vessels;\(^4\)
- Development of the tourism industry outside the control of Antarctic Treaty Parties through e.g. flags of convenience;
- Increase in the complexity of Antarctic tourism, which is turning into a conglomerate of overlapping issues including cross-cutting issues, and which makes regulation increasingly more complex;
- Impact of tourism on the environment, particularly cumulative impacts;
- Erosion of the intrinsic values of Antarctica and the primary role of science and environmental protection in the Antarctic Treaty System as a result of tourism; effects of tourism on the geopolitical stability of the Antarctic system.

All of these issues, taken individually and in their various interactions, raise concern about the effects of tourism on the natural environment and in other values and uses of the Antarctic, and could be addressed in some way by further regulation. In particular, tourism expansion, diversification and site occupation – which are mutually interlinked – should be addressed in a proactive manner through mandatory regulation. Some forms of tourism should be prevented, including ending the use of very large cruise liners in the Antarctic Treaty Area; the occupation of new sites, particularly in the interior of Antarctica; and the establishment of tourism infrastructure ashore. In addition, the scale of tourism should be constrained, at least at some sites. Also, Parties should make clear statements, individually and collectively, that they will not engage in tourism activities as operators or facilitators of essential logistics. Overall, Antarctic Treaty states should take proactive steps to constrain tourism developments within ecologically sustainable limits appropriate for the Antarctic.

Furthermore, pragmatic precautionary approaches should be used with more frequency, particularly in the absence of regular and effective monitoring of this activity, further discussed below, and generally in the absence of adequate information about potential tourism impacts. In some cases, tourism activity should be limited at certain times and/or places in the absence of adequate information about potential impacts. This would be in agreement with Resolution 7 (2009), which states that:

\(^4\) According to industry sources (e.g. IAATO 2011: 3) the recent ban on HFO has led to some pullback in the use of vessels conducting cruise-only programs i.e. vessels carrying more than 500 passengers. These large vessels are expensive to retrofit to burn lighter fuels.
Tourism should not be allowed to contribute to the long-term degradation of the Antarctic environment and its dependent and associated ecosystems, or the intrinsic natural wilderness and historical values of Antarctica. In the absence of adequate information about potential impacts, decisions on tourism should be based on a pragmatic and precautionary approach that also incorporates an evaluation of risks.

Environmental aspects and impacts of tourism

Current research on the impacts of Antarctic tourism has to date covered a patchwork of issues, sites, and circumstances. The evidence indicates that tourism-related impacts are possible and likely at some sites. The presence of tourism itself at sites where previously this activity was absent could in itself be regarded as an impact on some of the values of Antarctica recognised by the Protocol.

The tourism footprint may be masked by natural variability; environmental effects caused by climate change; and anthropogenic impacts caused by activities other than tourism. These various sources of environmental changes may overlap, and so the footprint of tourism, if it exists, may be difficult to identify. This does not necessarily mean that tourism does not cause environmental impacts, some of which may be significant. Consequently, in ASOC’s view it is important to identify the contribution of tourism to environmental impact in the context of other cultural and environmental processes of change, with a view of better managing this activity as well as the Antarctic environment as a whole.

Identifying the footprint of tourism would require increasing monitoring efforts and the use of suitably robust scientific methods, both traditional and novel. Recently, for instance, Australian and British scientists have been exploring the utility of an automated camera system for cost-effective land-based predator monitoring in Antarctica. Camera images are used to attain measurements of breeding success and other parameters. Cameras are being used to allow penguin monitoring at less accessible sites, and to extend monitoring to other nesting seabird species. In some instances this approach could usefully complement traditional field studies and other research methods.

Monitoring, however, has a financial cost as well as a cost in human resources and scientific/logistic assets. In a different governance context, an environmental tax to pay for monitoring efforts has been applied to visitors to the Arctic archipelago of Svalbard. However, Parties may not be prepared to pass the bill on to the tourism industry or their consumers because, among other reasons, of sensitivities over matters addressed by Art. IV of the Antarctic Treaty. In that case ASOC contends that Parties will need to pay for this essential work themselves. Alternatively, forms of partnership between various stakeholders could be explored – for example, through the use of an automated camera system partially sponsored by the tourism industry in partnership with other stakeholders, to be complemented with other monitoring methods.

Overall, monitoring of sites used for tourism purposes should be carried out regularly and effectively, while ensuring that data collection and analysis are carried out objectively.

Closing remarks

This information paper examines key issues that are relevant for a strategic review of Antarctic tourism. Based on the general principles of Resolution 7 (2009) and the discussion above it is apparent:

• That increased supervision of tourism, through inspections under Art. VII of the Antarctic Treaty and Art. 14 of the Protocol, or other means, is necessary to match the scale of this activity;
• That some aspects of tourism, particularly expansion, diversification and new site occupation (which are mutually interlinked) should be addressed in a proactive manner, and prevented as required, through mandatory regulation; and
• That the environmental impacts of tourism should be identified using appropriate methods, including empiric scientific research, and to the extent possible separated from the impacts of other activities or by environmental changes. This would require dedicated monitoring efforts to be paid for by Parties, the industry, consumers, or through partnerships between various stakeholders.
If the ATCPs fail to take these actions within a reasonable time frame, the chances are that tourism will continue its dynamic trajectory and within a decade or two evolve into something quite different and more intrusive than what it is today. The Antarctic would become quite a different place as a result, and the values of this region that the 1991 Protocol was designed to protect would be placed in jeopardy.

1. References


