# Closeness
Corona and Closeness – quo vadimus?

Seen from a distance …
When we chose the title 'Distance' for the Passport edition in the spring of 2019, we already had it firmly in our minds to set a tourist counterpoint at some future date with a Passport centred on 'Closeness' [1].

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1 Closeness' according to the German 'Duden': 1. short distance, 2. short temporal distance, 3. somebody being close; close relationship
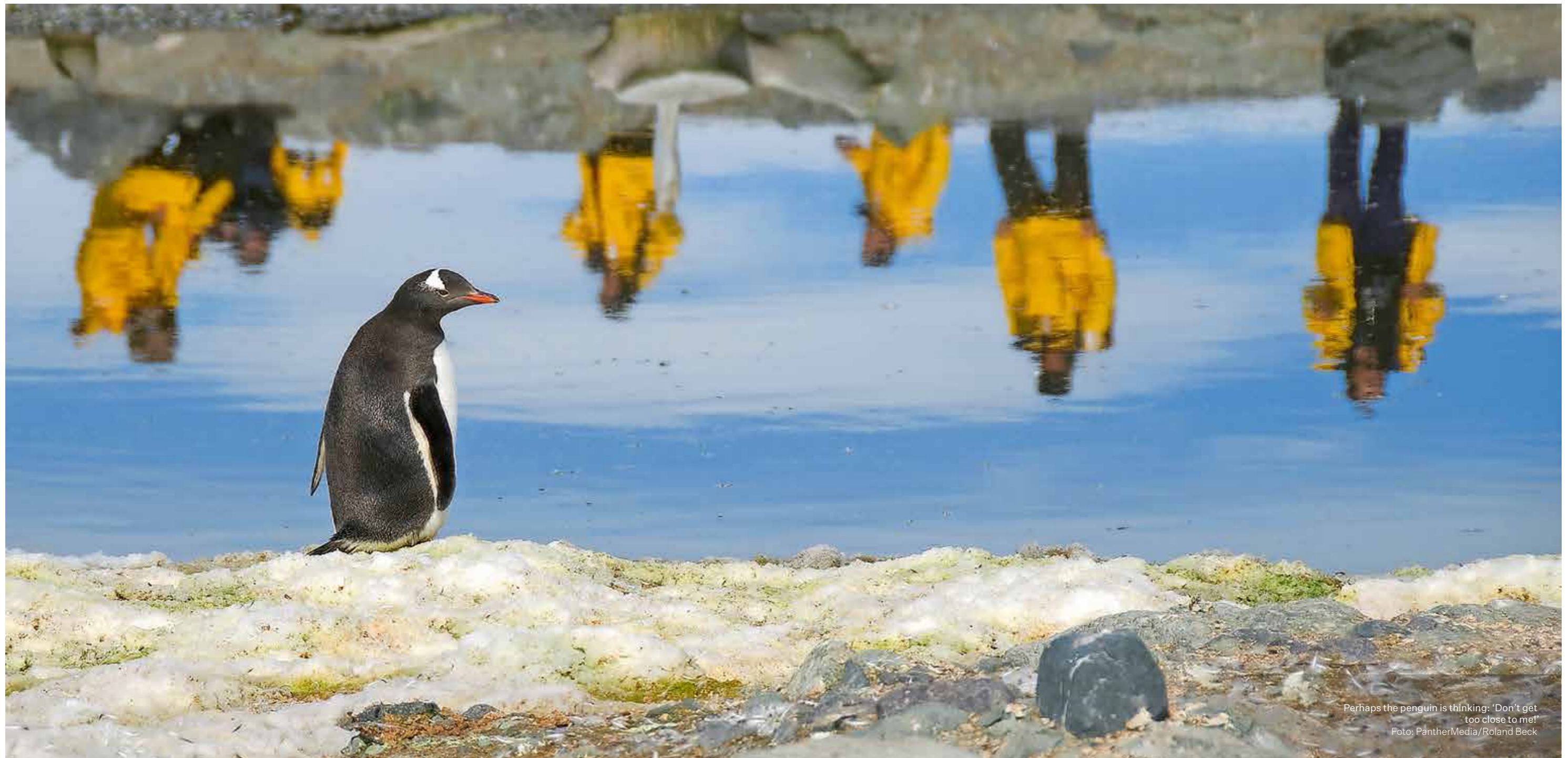
Perhaps the penguin is thinking: 'Don't get too close to me!'
Foto: PantherMedia/Roland Beck

Felix Kolbeck

The leader began in 2019 with the first two adapted lines from Goethe's quatrain 'Erinnerung' [2]

*'Why wander into the distance,
When the good is so close?'*

What is 'the good' in the eyes of the poet? The last two lines of the poem suggest what the answer may be:

*'Learn only to seize happiness
For happiness is always there.'*

Well, in the first place the following years of 2020 and 2021 brought us anything but moments of happiness if we limit them at least to the outbreak and development of the corona pandemic.

Closeness in pandemic times

As we all know, our lives run their course in different spheres of families, friendships, working life, and in social and cultural structures and milieus. These spheres are fundamentally based on sharing spatial, mental, interest-driven or natural closeness.

Both the pandemic itself but equally the measures taken to fight the pandemic as well are having a huge impact on all these spheres. The equilibrium is being disturbed in many settings and as time progresses this is being reflected all the more in societal upheavals and individuals suffering among other things from depression and anxiety disorders the more these spheres are disturbed and the longer these conditions go on.

Infections, contact restrictions, isolation, quarantine … no one could have even imagined such things in 2019. In all of these terms, however, 'closeness' – above all closeness to fellow human beings – is a crucial factor, albeit in the negative sense of something to be avoided. Right from the very beginning, a law was introduced in the pandemic which runs profoundly counter to human nature: 'Closeness is harmful!'

At the same time policymakers strove and are striving to define a completely new, scientifically very one-sided closeness, calling on selected disciplines and culminating in December 2021 in a very partisan

make-up of the 'Corona Expert Council of the Federal Government'. What the Federal Government had in mind with this expert council was to actually further strengthen the fight against the pandemic by having the solid foundations of broader(!) scientific expertise. The scientific achievements of the council's individual members do of course deserve every respect but it is then even all the more striking that the following disciplines which seek to explain and to improve the 'spheres of everyday human reality' are nowhere to be found on the panel or are only concerned with side issues: management experts, economists, legal experts, self-employed persons, social scientists, cultural scientists, educationalists, psychologists and psychotherapists. Germany – a land of the arts and humanities? Not even the association levels from these fields are represented.

Closeness in confinement: telecommuting, homeschooling and other euphemisms

Being rent asunder from one's basic need for closeness inescapably goes hand in hand with being 'thrown back to fending for oneself' at first. Our gregarious instincts allow us to accept and put up with this for only a certain length of time and this is conditional on two things being fulfilled: firstly, a subjectively perceived increase in the soundness of our own health, and secondly, a realistic prospect of the customary circumstances we generally see as desirable being restored.

The circumstances of our lives in 2020 and 2021 were associated for many with a forced interweaving of the spheres Living – Working – Educating. To sell it all more easily, politicians and the media resorted to the language of in some cases familiar (telecommuting) and in others new euphemisms (homeschooling). Research specifically carried out into the psychological outcomes of working from home show a very nuanced picture.[3] Positive effects such as greater flexibilisation and supposedly better opportunities for simultaneous or nearby childcare or care of the elderly pit themselves against isolation, dwindling team spirit, physical inactivity as well as back trouble and other psychological conditions. It may be presumed that due to a certain euphoria emanating from a 'We Feeling' (campaign: 'Flatten the curve!'), the high regard for homeworking at the beginning of the pandemic was still significantly higher than it is at the moment and will be in the future. Effectiveness and a

sense of well-being working from home also crucially depend on the home environment,[4] which in turn can create great potential for further divisions in society: 'Homeworking is thus set to become a new status symbol for the winners of the new worlds of work'.[5] Those who have the wherewithal for the right kind of place to live and work and/or have the right kind of job will benefit while all others will fall by the wayside. Irrespective of this, many employees are quite clear in their own minds that want to keep their private and family life apart from their working life.

Closing schools pours yet more oil on the socially troubled waters by extending the further division fuelled by homeworking of the working population to the lives of children and adolescents still learning. 'Homeschooling' – an absurd term which suggests that parents can accord their children the school education which they would have at school.

Employers and educational establishments appropriating private closeness has taken on the character of social self-deception. Given their meagre standing and the insignificance described above of the arts and humanities in arriving at political decisions in pandemic times, this arouses no further surprise.

The quest for closeness: trips and overvisiting

Many people were also able to get something positive out of the forced closeness within their four walls. Out of the sheer necessity some learnt new forms of sport at home, became more aware of their lifestyle (diet, communication) or discovered new hobbies – as far as their circumstances actually allowed them to.

But at some point or other we've had enough – we've got to get out. In addition to the '3G' rules of geimpft, genesen, getestet (vaccinated, recovered, tested), a fourth one slowly but surely emerged as well: an-

The Castel Sant'Angelo in Rome: the closeness to the place of longing always leads to the closeness to people too.
Photo:: Felix Kolbeck

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2 The original text of the 1827 poem reads: Would you roam forever onward? See the good that lies so near.

3 Cf. Lanzke, A. (2021) and the studies mentioned there.

4 Cf. Pfnür, A. et al. (2021), p. 88 and Immobilien Aktuell (2021)
5 Pfnür, A. et al. (2021), p. XIX

noyed. Countless trips close by instead of fewer holidays far afield. That's what happened in particular in 2020 and it was fairly typical in 2021 as well. And things often reached such a point that the local residents in the tourist destinations felt their living environment was being restricted, which further whipped up the overtourism debate set in motion already well before the pandemic. Yet it is not overtourism at the day trippers' destinations but an overvisiting phenomenon. Many places would undoubtedly be delighted to see more overnight guests and holidaymakers but there then have to be sufficient and bookable overnight capacities as well. The attractiveness of Germany as a holiday country in the last two years has frequently seen holiday hotels so well booked up as never before. [6] It is safe to assume that this was not just a 'corona trend' but that the appeal of holidaying close by and getting their under your own steam is here to stay.[7]

The viability of destinations close to home in terms of the number of guests, traffic flows and infrastructure usage as well as sustainability and tourism acceptance is at the centre of numerous current research projects. The Department of Tourism at Munich's University of Applied Sciences in collaboration with the Bavarian Centre for Tourism, for example, is also investigating to what extent new participation models aimed at a more sustainable tourism development may work for the citizens affected.[8]

What has likewise been observed is a trending urban outmigration. According to a survey conducted by the ifo Institute in the summer of 2021, close on 13% of the respondents living in the German cities were planning to leave within the next 12 months.[9] Of note is also the fact that some 46% of the interviewees planning to move in the near future said that their plans were influenced by the corona pandemic situation. The future and how the pandemic progresses will tell how long this upward trend will continue. It would certainly be a relief for the overheated property markets in many urban centres even if the exodus from the cit-ies at times bears traits of escapism. What is interesting to note is that moving house or flat is in the main to somewhere 'close by': 'In times of corona, people increasingly want to move out into the country but at the same time they don't want to do without the advantages of urban life and having first-rate health care.'[10]

The ambivalence of closeness

From an overall perspective, 'closeness' – like its antonym 'distance' – stands for a concept observable in space and time, and in parts for a construct which cannot or can only with great difficulty be observed in the fields of psychology and sociology.[11] Perceived closeness can be experienced as pleasant or as a nuisance from the psychological point of view. If tourists happen upon some locals in a destination, it can lead to a mutually positively experienced closeness, especially if the visitors contribute to the creation of value in the local economy. But it can also be the complete opposite, with the tourist feeling a 'I've finally got here, really close …'. He is aware of where he set off from and creates what for him is a new closeness at his journey's end through consumption and availing himself of resources. The locals often feel more of a 'Just don't get too close to me'; in an extreme case they see their very home town threatened in terms of their right to their 'immediate ancestral space' or living environment.

With city breaks, the joint closeness experience of the city folks and the visitors is different, of course, and is also regarded differently to the situation where tourists in an exotic setting get too close to an indigenous people. How will we one day in retrospect judge whether and to what extent the corona pandemic resulted in readjustments of the short- and long-term perceptions?

In addition, the individual person will need to be considered, for within the broadly defined groups of locals and guests, there are, naturally enough, both role reversals and highly different characters and influences determined by the situation which merit being treated differently and at an individual level.

It will be fascinating to see how this ambivalence of perceived and experienced closeness on holidays

6 Cf. Deutscher Tourismusverband DTV (2021), p. 15
7 Cf. Lanz, I. et al. (2021), p. 17
8 Cf. Lanz, I. et al. (2021), p. 17
9 Cf. Dolls, M.; Mehles, J.-C. (2021), p. 27. 18,000 people living in urban, suburban and rural areas were interviewed.

10 Enders, K. (2021)
11 Cf. Kolbeck, F. (2019), p. 8

evolves in the coming years. The onus is very much on tourism research in this respect. In addition to many new findings, one fundamental experience will, however, remain: we human beings love closeness – to ourselves and to each other. We need it like we need air to breathe and not even face masks are going to change that. ▥

The Castel Sant'Angelo in Rome: the closeness to the place of longing always leads to the closeness to people too.
Photo:: Felix Kolbeck

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Coworking as a Chance for Rural Areas

Changing guest and customer needs from long stay to workation

It is especially in the tourist industry as well that many jobs are dependent on the employees being on site. All the more enticing then is the potential of coworking for destinations and businesses in rural areas.
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Simon Werther

In these last few months of the pandemic, the discussions about the potentials of coworking have gathered momentum again. This necessarily sees the all-important question put centre stage as to how the change in office work and the trend towards so-called hybrid working, meaning a mixture of working in the office itself and working from home, will develop in the future. The main theme of 'Closeness' takes a special look at this aspect because opportunities for coworking set themselves apart precisely by virtue of their closeness to the temporary or long-term centre of the coworkers' lives and the fact that they are designed to avoid long commutes and with it to increase both the quality of life and of working life itself.

Coworking: flexibilised form of working in times of New Work

The flexibilised form of working known as 'coworking' has been around for many years now and has made its mark just as much in the form of coworking spaces for freelancers and knowledge workers as it has within companies as corporate coworking (Werther, 2021, pp. 3 ff.). Common to all manifestations of coworking is that it involves 'a new form of working flexibly and temporarily next to each other' (Merkel, 2013, p. 35). It therefore often has people working together at places who are not actively working on a joint task or in the same department. The aspect of community and social belonging is nevertheless of great importance, which is why it is precisely the experience of social isolation working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic that would seem to make a surge in coworking advisable.

Basic distinctions can be made between various types of coworking. Bernhardt (2021, pp. 57 ff.) distinguishes between true coworking, curated coworking and coworking as a commodity. True coworking is the original form of self-organised communitisation according to the principle of equality and on the basis of the five values Collaboration, Community, Sustainability, Openness and Accessibility. Curated coworking follows these values to a certain extent but there is a higher-level responsibility so we are no longer talking about complete self-organisation and equality of all coworkers. In contrast to these two approaches, coworking as a commodity has a service provider at the forefront whose business model is to specifically offer coworking. It is this variant that we will be focussing on in this article because it promises to release great potential for destinations and tourist companies.

A limiting factor which obviously needs to be considered is that being able to telecommute is only possible to a very limited extent for many sectors and jobs. This is clearly evidenced too in the maximum proportion of employees working from home in the last few years being 27 per cent (Statista, 2022). It is especially in the tourist industry as well that many jobs are dependent on the employees being on site. All the more enticing then is the potential of coworking for destinations and businesses in rural areas.

Changed guest and customer target groups with individual needs

Flexibilisation of working hours and location is a critical factor in New Work and in post-pandemic working life. New Work is far more than this flexibilisation since it is especially here that the meaningfulness of doing a job, autonomy and participation are of particular importance. Flexibilised working hours and locations are fundamental to entirely new usage scenarios by guests and customers, especially in destinations and businesses in rural regions – this being contingent on certain conditions first having been fulfilled. No matter whether we are talking about coworking spaces in rural areas operated by the local authority or about accommodation with coworking or remote working offerings: it is vital that the technical infrastructure be at a high level and that there is sufficient bandwidth for Internet access. This aspect is a key selection criterion in particular for potential coworkers as they will otherwise not have a dependable working environment.

Moreover, the cost as a deciding factor is often a key consideration since it is particularly with long stays of more than four weeks combined with the coworking services used that there are higher costs of living and for accommodation than for a nine-day holiday. Coworkers as guests with these changed needs and expectations can thus result in higher occupancy rates in establishments offering accommodation, especially in the off-peak season, or in regions not so overrun with tourists can mean additional business potential by addressing a broader target group.

Workation and coworkation: potential for coworking in rural areas

It is especially in rural areas that workation in general and coworkation in particular can bring many advantages for destinations and businesses. Workation may broadly be seen as a combination of work and holiday while coworkation is narrower in scope and means separate accommodation with a shared room for cow-

Image: robu_s/stock.adobe.com

orking and often organised leisure-time activities as well (Werther, 2021, pp. 152 ff.).

There are already numerous businesses offering coworkation in Europe and further afield, for example projectbay workation in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, Coworking Bansko in Bulgaria and a great many companies in South-East Asia, for instance on Bali and in Chiang Mai in Thailand. Rayaworx on Majorca can be categorised more as workation in general because it just basically links work with holiday. Coconat in the small town of Bad Belzig in the north-eastern German state of Brandenburg has adopted a special approach, specifically positioning itself as a 'Workation Retreat' for the city folk of Potsdam and Berlin. It is often not possible for commercial operations to cover their costs if they only offer coworking in rural regions so it is especially the combination of providing accommodation, events and coworking such as Coconat markets that is more realistic from a business point of view.

It is particularly municipal destination and regional development organisations that take on an important role in this respect by providing inexpensive premises for coworking spaces or even running coworking spaces themselves. The relevance and potentials of coworking in these contexts quickly become obvious too when we look at organisations such as CoworkationALPS, which acts as a multiplier and networking platform for all stakeholders in the hotel trade, for self-contained coworking spaces and for municipal organisations as well.

It should never be forgotten, however, that workation and coworkation will continue to blur the dividing lines between working life and private life, as it is entirely taken for granted and positively received in the concept of work-life blending. This will compromise the quality of holidays in their traditional sense, which from a psychological and occupational medicine perspective can certainly be seen critically.

Coworking: development prospects close by and far away

The increasing importance of out-in-the-country coworking in the post-pandemic era is demonstrated in particular by the fact that spaces for coworking in rural areas make shorter commutes possible. The special charm of coworking is, thus, in the closeness. In exactly the same way, looking at workation and coworkation shows that coworking far away can be equally appealing if it enables you to get on with your work. In summary, it can be stated that coworking plays a key role in the rural regions both by virtue of the closeness to and by reason of the distance from where the coworker lives. It is now up to all the actors involved – whether they be politicians, associations or businesses – to tap this potential and to fill it with life. ▥

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Project report: COVID-19 and the Bavarian tourist sector

Crisis management, resilience factors and recommendations for action
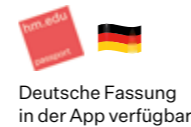
Celine Chang, Katrin Eberhardt, Markus Pillmayer

The COVID-19 pandemic continues unabated, with incidences up since the end of October 2021 and new strains of the virus as well as vaccination rates too low requiring the sort of tighter regulations which are also having a major impact on the tourism industry in Bavaria. November 2021 saw hotels and restaurants having to close completely in a number of regions in Bavaria when the incidence rate passed the 1,000 mark. The issue is, thus, still very much on the agenda. Within the research project 'COVID-19 and the Bavarian tourist industry – crisis management, resilience factors and recommendations for action' funded by the Bavarian Ministry of Economic Affairs, Regional Development and Energy, a total of 74 experts from various stakeholder groups of the sector were canvassed from May 2021 in the first year of the project for their thoughts on crisis management and the development of resilience in the current situation by means of interviews and focus group discussions. Based on a multilevel approach at a company, regional and supraregional level, these issues are being analysed in the project and the employees' points of view are also being factored in. The first results were presented in November 2021 at the 24th annual conference of the DGT, the German Society for Tourism Science.

Project background and status of the research

There are hardly any findings to date on the correlation between crisis management and resilience in tourism (Prayag, 2018). The link with human resources management (HRM) in crises, or here perhaps rather the COVID-19 pandemic, has so far been given barely any space either in the literature (cf. Adikaram et al., 2020), even though those working in tourism

Celine Chang, Katrin Eberhardt and Markus Pillmayer in front of the project poster at the DGT conference in Rust's Europa-Park.
Photo: private

have been hit particularly hard by the crisis (Baum et al., 2020). The studies available mainly deal with the effects of crises on the tourist industry as a whole (Bjelicic, 2012; Herbane, 2010; Song et al., 2011), with the focus being on crises such as terrorism, political instability and economic crises within certain geographical regions (Hall, 2010; Pillmayer/Scherle, 2014; Putra/Hitchcock, 2009).

Selected results

The qualitative surveys conducted so far make plain the dramatic effects of the pandemic – effects which no organisation in tourism was prepared for. The pandemic is described as a multidimensional crisis impacting at the personal, business and regional levels. The sector is very vulnerable and is still the hardest hit.

Multiple tourist businesses are really feeling the strain from skilled personnel leaving to move into other sectors and it is this pressure the crisis is having that continues to be seen as the greatest challenge. Employees having less and less to do, taking a financial hit and as a result feeling insecure and anxious, and wondering what the future will bring culminates in

them leaving their jobs of their own accord, and a number of businesses are seeing that HR work has to change in this respect, as the following quote illustrates: *'You know the lockdown has done something to people and that obviously has consequences for our HR work, because we have to coach on the mental side, we*
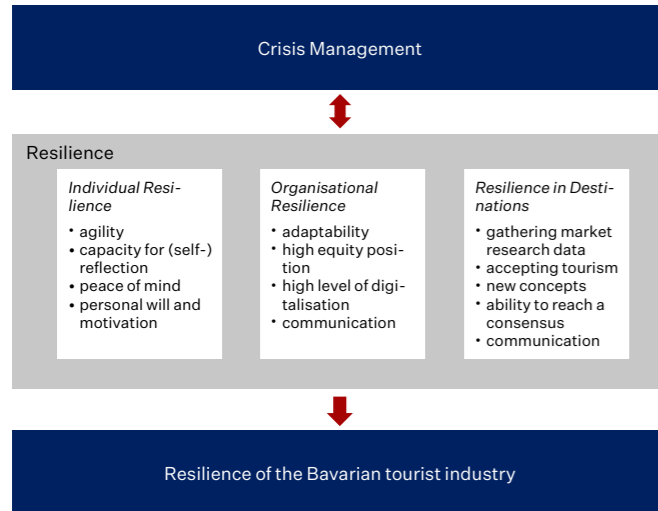
Table 1: correlation between crisis management and resilience factors at an individual, organisational and destination level. The resilience factors (examples) given are based on the results of the qualitative content analysis.
Source: own illustration; resilience model following Soucek et al., 2016

have to coach using counselling psychology and above all we have to teach our staff how to shield themselves against, well, verbal attacks, and that's not so easy, of course.' (hotel manager of a family-run private hotel in a rural area).

On the other hand, the businesses are in part overstretched with trying to interpret directives and new regulations introduced by parliament and the ministries. Constantly having to shut down and start up again because of multiple lockdowns poses a major challenge for all the key players in the tourist trade and the financial constraints have not been fully overcome either.

Becoming increasingly more important in this context is being robust or resilient enough to ride out such kinds of crises. Table 1 shows the correlation between crisis management and resilience factors at an individual, organisational and destination level, all resilience factors together influencing the resilience of the Bavarian tourist industry.

The preliminary conclusion to be drawn is that we have not yet weathered the crisis and there is as yet no telling what the full extent of the reverberations may be. What we do know is that businesses which were already in a healthy position before the pandemic also mostly have the resilience to overcome the crisis. Problems which already existed before the crisis, however, are being exacerbated by the pandemic, as is clearly exemplified by the following quotation: 'Because what a crisis has shown is that the problems which already exist generally get worse. *That's why you always have to simply stick at it and to actually get to grips right now with issues which are important for the future.'* (political representative). Those working in Bavarian tourism are very much stretched when it comes to crisis management, in some cases overstretched. The associations thus play an important role in the current situation and act as a 'voice' or 'translator' to support those affected.

Prospects

Based on the findings of the qualitative survey, questionnaires are currently being formulated for the quantitative studies still to be embarked upon. Specific thematic blocks focussing on crisis management and resilience are hoped to provide further insights into how the Bavarian tourist sector can make itself more resilient to any crises arising in the future. The idea for the quantitative survey is that it will be comprised of several questionnaires specifically tailored to the interviewees so as to obtain the most accurate results possible. These results will then be evaluated, documented and interpreted. ▥

You can find more information on the project at www.coretour.hm.edu

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Graphics: Sonja Groiss and Anna Kaufmann

Generation Y

A workshop & game about the downsides of digitalisation

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The Generation Y workshop has been set up for 10 to 20 participants from the age of 16 and is designed for anyone wishing to find out more about digitalisation and the effects it has on society.

The module 'Innovation and Sustainability' was included for the first time this semester in the new Master's degree course 'Strategy and Innovation in Tourism'. In addition to covering sustainability issues, the module saw the students delving into digital innovations and their significance in tourism, learning to understand innovation processes and innovation management, and applying creativity techniques in order to generate goal-driven innovation ideas and to devise solutions to problems. Although digital transformation goes hand in hand with many advantages, critical consideration should be given to the downsides too. And that is precisely what the students did in the Generation Y workshop with Sonja Groiss and Anna Kaufmann, the two workshop leaders.

The workshop is based on an exciting card game, itself called Generation Y, which the participants also play themselves at the end. The game has them slipping into the role of either the data concern Crypto-

'Master's students creatively and playfully put their minds to work in the Generation Y workshop on the pros and cons of digitalisation.'
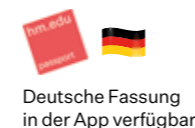
conda, whose aim is to increasingly restrict citizens' privacy and to get them under their control through innovations, or into the role of the activist group Generation Y, which was formed to put the concern in its place.

It's up to the students to act in the interests of whichever side they represent as they play the game and to make strategic choices as regards events. Who will come out triumphant at the end?

Taking a critical look at social media
The first part of the workshop kicked off with a critical look at social media. This included an overview of the principles social media is based on, how it works and with which formats our attention can best be aroused in such a fast-moving world as ours.

The workshop leaders then moved on to the matter of copyright, data privacy and secure passwords but there was also discussion of the general risks found in cyberspace.

An important part of the workshop were the creative side tasks and surveys, which enabled a lively exchange of views and ideas to take place. This also gave the participants an insight into a possible conceptional approach to a game project.

In the beginning was the inspiration ...
The second part of the workshop went on to lay the foundations for the game. The two workshop leaders first of all presented a number of prominent figures in digitalisation who had inspired them in designing the

The workshop leaders Sonja Groiss and Anna Kaufmann have already won a prize for the online game Generation Y.
Photo: Sonja Groiss and Anna Kaufmann

game. There was also a short journey back through time to when algorithms first had to be invented to create the digital world as we know it today. In addition, philosophical viewpoints and visions of the future with regard to man and machine living together were also considered. But also jobs which will be in far greater demand in the future provided a springboard for discussion. The students were constantly encouraged to become active themselves in this second part too.

Gripping right to the very end

The game itself then got underway in the third module. But that wasn't all. While voting for or against the technologies took place, the workshop leaders explained the terms which are encountered and discussed the scenarios with the participants. This then paved the way for discussion on a whole gamut of critical technologies:

- Is Internet censorship an appropriate way of preventing fake news and manipulation or would we then be curtailing our freedom of expression?
- Generally accessible movement profiles support mobility research and help in visitor management but do we really want everyone to know where we are going?
- Should we prune our at times burgeoning bureaucracy using a social credit system which rewards certain behaviour patterns with bonus points or punishes them with minus points?

The students discussed these as well as many other questions and innovations while they were at the same time deciding – depending on their character in the game – if the technology will be introduced or if Generation Y can prevent it happening through their protests. It remained gripping right to the very end even though the online version of the game it became necessary to use made seeing through the poker faces somewhat more difficult for us. Everyone agreed at the end though, that they really liked the game and it left us with many new ideas as well and not least the knowledge that the decision as to what our future will look like still lies with us as a society.
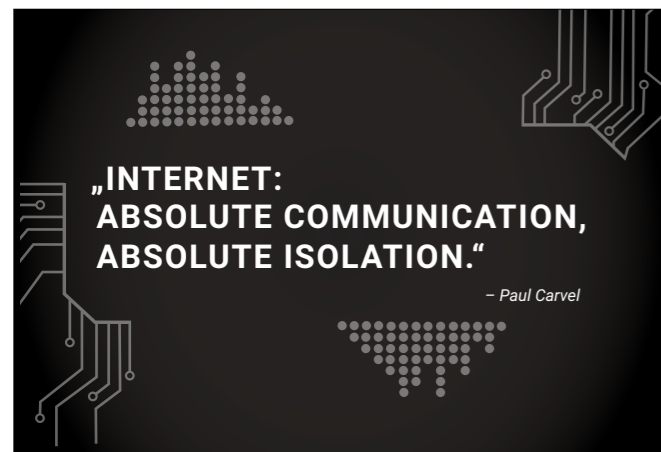

Grafik: Sonja Groiss und Anna Kaufmann

We would like to take this opportunity to express our wholehearted thanks to the workshop leaders Sonja Groiss and Anna Kaufmann, who have already won prizes for their game.

The workshop leaders

Sonja Groiss and Anna Kaufmann are still continuing to develop the game in their spare time, their aim being to refine and enhance the game concept. The idea came to them while working on their diploma project at the higher education institute die Graphische in Vienna and ultimately manifests itself in an analogue card game and a workshop on digitalisation. It is hoped that it will help students better understand this highly interesting and wide-ranging subject and that it will raise their awareness and interest in exploring it in greater depth in their own free time.

"INTERNET: ABSOLUTE COMMUNICATION, ABSOLUTE ISOLATION."

– Paul Carvel

Interested in the workshop?
Contact: sonjagroiss@gmail.com

Graphics: Sonja Groiss and Anna Kaufmann

The journey of a lifetime

We sailed the Arabian Gulf as representatives of Munich University of Applied Sciences and, so to speak, as 'ambassadors' for one whole month. We took part in this year's ITHAS (International Tourism and Hospitality Academy at Sea) on the Omani navy's tall ship 'Shabab Oman II' and called in at all six member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).
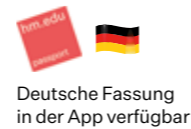
Deutsche Fassung
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The 87-meter-long Shabab Oman II
is one of the most modern sail trai-
ning vessels and has been sailing
the high seas since 2013.
Photo: Leon Oettl

*Daniel Morawek, Martin Newrzella, Leon Oettl,
Isabel Zengerle*

The year 2021 marked the 14th ITHAS and for the first time the event was held outside of Europe. The journey began in Oman. Following entertaining stopovers in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Qatar, we finally moored in Dubai for ten days, where we went to Expo 2020. The main themes of the world exhibition are creating the future in sustainability and mobility as well as opportunities for a better world tomorrow.

We then set sail back to Oman. It was an unforget-table experience which enabled us to gain not only theoretical knowledge: besides the sailing, it was above all the intercultural experience which we will never forget.

ITHAS – Academy at Sea

What does it mean to swap a comfortable life and the day-to-day activities you are so used to for a deman-ding academic programme combined with a sailing course run by the Omani navy on a sail training vessel? ITHAS is an academic programme organised by part-ner universities of HM (Munich University) – the Uni-versity of Zagreb and the German University of Tech-nology in Oman. With the help of experimental lear-ning, it offers the students taking part a completely new form of education and a different approach to the tourism degree course.

A colourful international mix: the participants at the ITHAS 2021 on the cam-
pus of the German University of Technology in Oman.
Photo: German University of Technology in Oman (GUtech

neighbouring states and in particular at the Expo in Dubai, which meant we were able to directly combine theory with practice.)

At the Expo in Dubai

The grounds of the Expo site are divided up into three areas with different main themes: sustainability, mo-bility and opportunities. Virtually every country has its own pavilion and focuses on one of the themes. In addition to presenting action plans to achieve the SDGs, which differ widely from nation to nation, each country can also choose themes of its own and thereby promote tourism, for example. The themes of innova-tion and sustainability are not limited to just the pavi-lions – little robots pass you by on the streets drawing your attention to wearing your mask properly. There are many water dispensers too and also several bins for separating waste. Food is handed out in environ-mentally friendly packaging and plastic is largely avoided. Electric golf carts and scooters are available for eco-friendly transport across the grounds and in the middle of the Expo site there is also a canopy made of solar panels which is lit up brightly at night.

Along with the SDGs, the academic part of the ITHAS centred on mega events, the Expo being a per-fect example. The costs of such an event may be huge but the long-term benefits outweigh them. With visi-tors given an insight into its culture, life and scenery, the country is presented with a unique opportunity for destination marketing. Millions of people have been to the Expo, including a large number as well who but

'After we returned, one thing was clear: the ITHAS was the highlight of our university course.'

SDGs and mega events the focal points

At university you are normally taught the theory or the critical approach first of all and after that follows the practical experience. It's different at the ITHAS be-cause there the focus this year was on the SDGs (sus-tainable development goals) of the UN and on organi-sing mega events. We covered the theoretical con-cepts during the many study trips to the GCC

for this event would not have travelled to the Emirates. Nor should secondary and tertiary bonuses be ignored, for example for hotels and restaurants in Dubai. What is important here is good management extending beyond the event period, for instance by secondary exploitation of the buildings erected as residential space or business premises.

Off to an adventure! Four weeks on board

A highlight for us – along with the academic programme – was the sailing training of the Royal Navy of Oman. The 87-meter-long Shabab Oman II is one of the most modern sail training vessels and has been sailing the oceans since 2013. This training with its military leaning was a great challenge for many of us and right from the very first day on board we were divided up into four different internationally mixed teams. In these teams we had to overcome diverse difficulties together in the following four weeks and life seemed to consist of just cleaning, sailing, working, studying and suffering but also of celebrating. Still being novice seafarers, we couldn't of course be immediately entrusted with duties which were too arduous and so it was that our training commenced with various introductory courses, for example on navigation using nautical charts and on what to do in emergency situations. At the time, none of us had yet realised that we would all be putting this knowledge and these skills into practice and on top of that in senior positions as well, for example at the helm of the ship or setting the sails around 50 metres up. Some of us really had to

force ourselves to overcome our fears of such a height while others couldn't get enough of climbing.

The work on and below deck was coupled with sleeplessness because we worked at night as well from around midnight to four in the morning – under a clear night sky with its countless shooting stars. There were three main jobs to do in each shift: navigating and determining the position of the ship on the nautical charts, keeping lookout on the foredeck and standing at the helm steering the ship. The other team members in the meantime learnt about knots, maritime law and how to handle the ropes properly to keep the ship on course.

International experience par excellence

It wasn't just during the course and sailing programme that we learnt a lot. Living together in extremely cramped conditions with 11 different nationalities for one month and being immersed into an unfamiliar cultural area proved to be such an enrichment. Although it is especially due to our experience of travelling that we are very open-minded, we journeyed there with a certain feeling of insecurity. This wasn't so much because of any prejudices but books and a seminar which were meant to prepare us for the Arabian culture. When we told our fellow Arab students over coffee while visiting our partner university about some of the 'rules' we had learnt, it was simply met with pitying smiles – we had been worrying far too much. The atmosphere among ourselves was one of openness and tolerance – we even had an exchange of views on critical issues. And even if there were differences of opinion, we listened to and respected each other. The personalities of all the students couldn't have been more heterogeneous – and that is precisely our trademark. Each brought his or her individual strengths into the team and the trip ended up being a success. What we will always remember is the wonderful hospitality extended to us in Oman, the other states we visited and on the ship.

A dream come true

After we returned, one thing was clear: the ITHAS was the highlight of our university course. The combination of theory and practice enabled us to acquire much in the way of new knowledge and skills – assets which will also help us later on in life. Participating has seen us grow personally too and we have also formed friendships for life – who would have thought at the beginning of our travels that there would already be two reunions with the other students in Zagreb and Munich within one month of our return? When we applied, hardly any of us believed it would work out – but thanks to the hard work and commitment of so many people, above all professor Nevenka Čavlek of Zagreb University, professor Heba Aziz of the GUTech in Oman and the Royal Navy of Oman, one of our big dreams came true. 🏛

Reunion in Munich.   Photo: Daniel Morawek

In Kuwait, first stopover on the sailing voyage to Dubai.   Photo: Daniel Morawek