DC: Public health policy and communication for public health

Public health as common goal or individual constraint in winter tourism of Tyrol and Vorarlberg

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Background:
In February 2020 the alpine village Ischgl, located in the Austrian province Tyrol, reached prominence as a COVID-19 hotspot and starting point for the virus diffusion in Europe. Since then, local authorities, winter tourism and its key stakeholders where under close supervision. The here presented study focusses on how they align their personal and corporate interests with collective interests of mitigating the spread of the virus.

Methods:
In summer 2020 a convergent parallel-mixed methods' approach was adopted. It includes 3 focus groups in skiing resorts of Tyrol and Vorarlberg, a quantitative complete online survey, with mayors of municipalities, managing directors of all cable cars companies as tourism associations and 22 qualitative expert interviews with this target groups.

Results:
There were 105 out of 375 mayors of municipalities, 57 out of 140 managing directors of all cable cars companies and 37 out of 41 tourism associations of Tyrol and Vorarlberg participating in the online survey. The demand for a standardized risk management in tourism was high, the willingness to compromise low. Inconsistent legal regulations, economic losses, acknowledging risks and taking responsibility for the own area of influence were conflicting topics.

Conclusions:
Uncertainty about legal requirements was widespread and therefore mitigating strategies and measures were often classified as a disturbance. Economic concerns where far more prevalent than concerns about public health, blaming other decision-makers was a common strategy. According to the results authorities where advised to:
-reduce complexity and increase transparency within the communication
-demonstrate uniformity without exceptions
-show solidarity to facilitate willingness to compromise

-provide future perspectives

Key messages:

- Although demanded a uniform risk management was only possible at a late stage in November 2020 and only in selected fields.
- COVID-19 promotes reluctance in making decisions.