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## Conflict and chaos: A case study of Ireland's COVID-19 outbound travel market

**Abstract.** During the COVID-19 pandemic the international outbound travel market from Ireland collapsed, declining at one point by 94%. This case study paper explores the environment which framed the collapse in travel, positioning it as one of conflict and chaos. The main objective is to document and analyse the legal, industry and societal factors which may have contributed to the collapse, identifying the key regulations, decisions, metrics, and societal responses, and exploring their intersection with outbound tourism. Three areas of inquiry are explored, namely: 1) the legal instruments used by government to restrict travel, 2) operational decisions made by industry, and 3) societal and media response to the pandemic. Three findings are presented from the desk research. First, it is suggested that the conflicting agendas of government and public health, the mainstream media and the travel industry would be more effectively dealt with in private as opposed to via news articles, social media arguments, and openly published letters. Second, clarity of communication from all three bodies needs improvement due to its impact on consumer confidence. Finally, the article proposes lessons for government in relation to future crisis management situations regarding outbound travel.

**Keywords:** Ireland, COVID-19, crisis management, media and society, governance, restrictions, legislation

**JEL Codes:** L83, Z30

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## 1. Introduction

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has witnessed many shocks to the tourism market (Hall, 2010) but none can be compared with the impact of COVID-19. Crises ranging from terrorist attacks, to health scares, to the financial crises have all impacted on global tourism frameworks (O'Brien, 2012; Pine & McKercher, 2004; Baxter & Bowen, 2004; Ritchie, 2004), leaving an industry that is often best understood through a kaleidoscope lens of volatility, exposure, resilience and adaptation (Burnett & Johnston, 2020).

COVID-19 first emerged in Wuhan, China in late 2019, rapidly spreading worldwide and causing a minimum of 150 million cases and 4 million deaths by the end of summer 2021 (United Nations World Health Organisation, 2021), with likely actual case numbers and deaths significantly higher (United Nations World Health Organisation, 2021). The virus was first confirmed on Irish shores on the 29th of February 2020 (BBC, 2020b), quickly establishing itself and causing widespread challenges to Irish society, healthcare and economy, with major damage inflicted on the inbound tourism industry as revenues collapsed by 85% (RTE, 2020b). By August 2021, the country had recorded more than 300,000 cases and over 5,000 deaths<sup>1</sup> (Government of Ireland, 2021a).

While early cases received prominent news coverage in Ireland, the impact of the to-be-declared pandemic on the hospitality and tourism industry was almost entirely unexpected. Prior to COVID-19, Ireland had been focussed on developing resilience in many sectors of the economy to prepare for Britain's withdrawal from the European Union (Burnett & Johnston, 2020). However, the unexpected and rapid arrival of COVID-19 exposed the lack of preparation for an impact of this magnitude. Short term measures such as the closure of the hospitality industry (Carswell & Bray, 2020), the cancellation of major events such as the St Patrick's Day festival parades (BBC, 2020a) and sporting events (RTE, 2020a), and the introduction of requirements to stay within a 2 km zone (Citizens Information, 2020a) were deemed to be harsh, but temporary, by the Minister for Health (Harris, 2021).

The immediate impact on the inbound tourism market was notable, with strong media focus throughout the pandemic on the restrictions on international arrivals. The 2020 revenue slump resulted in approximately 150,000 job losses (RTE, 2020c). Both summer 2020 and most of summer 2021 seasons were lost almost entirely for the inbound tourism market, due to the damage wreaked by the virus itself in addition to the legal travel restrictions, airline cancellations, public sentiment and solidarity, and media campaigns to discourage international

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<sup>1</sup> Exact figures were unavailable due to a cyber-attack on the Health Service Executive's IT infrastructure in May 2021.

travel. A strong emphasis from NPHE and the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) on not travelling abroad and engaging in domestic tourism (Holohan, 2020) was promoted, both to avoid importing the virus and to mitigate the damage from the loss of incoming international tourists (Irish Tourism Industry Confederation, 2020). This was supported in late 2020 with a stay and spend tax-credit voucher (Citizens Information, 2020a) although the initiative went largely underutilised due to further lockdowns (Independent.ie, 2021).

Multiple case studies have been published to date on the impact of COVID-19 on tourism, including on post-COVID-19 recovery (e.g. Fotiadis, Polyzos, & Huan, 2021), resetting tourism and regeneration (Sigala, 2020) and tourist behaviour (e.g. Kock et al., 2021). Less attention has focussed on Irish outbound market and the impact of the restrictions on key international tourism metrics. This is somewhat surprising, given Ireland's demographics, location and spending on international travel. According to the last census, Ireland's population was recorded at 4.904 million (Central Statistics Office, 2021a). Some 600,000 non-Irish nationals were resident in Ireland in 2019, representing 12.9% of the population and a large market who frequently travel overseas to visit friends and relatives (VFR), a market which has generally been one of the world's oldest and substantial, although likely underestimated in scale (Backer, 2012). In terms of geographical location, Ireland's position off the west coast of mainland Europe, its proximity to the United Kingdom and its strategic location between Europe and the United States, has facilitated a long and successful history in aviation. Multiple international airlines have had Irish CEOs in recent years, including British Airways, Ryanair, Malaysia Airlines, and Qantas (Regan, 2018). It also has a population passionate for international travel. In 2019, for example, Irish residents spent over €8 billion on international travel, making almost 9.4 million outbound trips. This represented a total of 66.9 million bed nights overseas, 74.5% of which were within the European Union (Glennon, 2020). The country has repeatedly achieved impressive metrics in aviation, compared with its near neighbours, although this has been severely challenged during COVID-19, as will be set out in the present article.

In 2019, before COVID-19, Ireland was the 16th largest in the aviation market in Europe by total seat capacity, significantly above its ranking as Europe's number 26 nation by population. However, in the week commencing 28-Jun-2021, Ireland ranks as the 23rd biggest aviation market in Europe by seats – a significant slump from pre-COVID-19. (Centre for Aviation CAPA, 2021)

The above figures are notable in the context of connectivity for an island state. By July 2021, Ryanair, for example, was operating 34% of its July 2019 capacity, while Aer Lingus, the second largest airline in the State, was operating at only 14% of its 2019 volume (Centre for Aviation CAPA, 2021). First quarter passenger

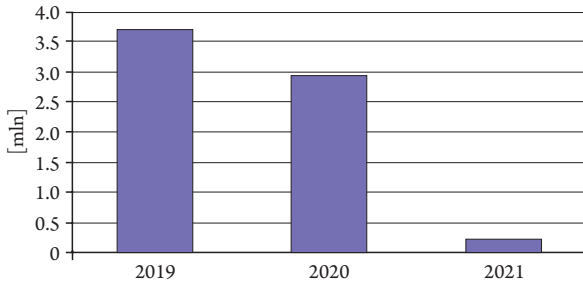


Fig. 1. Quarter 1 Passenger Departures Ireland, All Airports, 2019-2021

Source: Central Statistics Office 2021a.

departures from Ireland (Fig. 1) over the period 2019-2021 illustrate the scale of the fall (Central Statistics Office, 2021b). Declines in outbound passenger numbers at the country's international airports ranged from 94% at Dublin Airport, 96% at Kerry Airport, 98% at Cork at 99% at Knock Airport and Shannon Airport (Central Statistics Office, 2021a).

## 2. Methodology

COVID-19 themed research has dominated tourism publications during 2020 and 2021 due to the global nature of the pandemic, the myriad problems posed by the crisis and the prevailing nature of the issue, even as we approach two years since it first emerged. Surprisingly little has been written on the Irish experience of managing COVID-19 impacts in relation to tourism, either inbound or outbound. This is a clear gap in the literature that needs to be addressed, due to the stringent nature of the country's response to the pandemic and the lessons that can be learned from it for future tourism crisis management. Attributes of Ireland's tourism economy, including its geographical position, the contribution of tourism to GDP, Ireland's high uptake of outbound international travel and the country's long-established aviation connectivity with the UK, the USA, Europe, and the Middle East further contribute to the rationale for this article.

Since the aim for this research is to provide insights into the factors influencing the collapse in Irish outbound tourism, the focus in this article is on secondary data. The main objective here is to document the legal, industry and societal factors which may have contributed to the collapse, identifying the key regulations, decisions, metrics, and societal responses, and exploring their intersection with outbound tourism. Data sources were derived from government publications,

Table 1. Data sources used to inform the study

Data type	Data source
Legal restrictions and government guidelines	Stay-at-home restrictions, March 2020 S.I. No. 217/2021 – Health Act 1947 (Section 31A – Temporary Restrictions) (COVID-19) (No. 2) Regulations 2021 Citizens Information Website Re-Open EU mobile application Key government department websites, including health, transport, tourism An Garda Síochána (Ireland’s police force) Ireland’s COVID-19 data hub
Mainstream media publications from Ireland and abroad	RTE News The Irish Times The Irish Independent The Irish Examiner The BBC The Guardian
Official datasets	Fáilte Ireland Tourism Ireland Central Statistics Office Eurostat
National and international industry publications	Ryanair Aer Lingus Dublin Airport Authority Euro Control The Irish Tourism Industry Confederation (ITIC) The UNWTO

Source: compiled by the author.

mainstream media websites and publications from major industry players. Insofar as possible the study focuses on the period of February 2020 to July 2021, an 18-month period covering the confirmation of COVID-19 in Ireland to the launch of the digital COVID-19 certificate. The secondary sources presented in Table 1 were used to inform this study.

### 3. Legal measures

As COVID-19 began to make worldwide headlines in 2020, Ireland’s National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET) was responsible for monitoring the spread of the virus in the state. NPHET provided daily briefings to government and the media from early in the pandemic, briefings which were keenly followed

in Ireland (Cullen, 2020) with a population interested in daily case numbers, hospitalisations, testing statistics, intensive care admissions, mortality and later in the pandemic, vaccination rates. The national 'obsession' with daily case numbers was suggested to cause unnecessary anxiety (McGreevy, 2020).

Initially, international travel was restricted through stay-at-home orders, which banned non-essential travel. Increasingly complex measures were then introduced over the following year. For example, in summer 2020, the government introduced a requirement for 14 days isolation post international travel, multiple Department of Foreign Affairs travel restriction guidance, and, controversially, a requirement for any public servants to take a mandatory two-week leave post international travel, with no permission to work from home during this period. Other countries globally enforced even stricter lockdowns, including, for example, New Zealand's COVID-19 elimination strategy (O'Sullivan, 2021).

As case numbers dropped in Ireland in summer 2020, non-essential travel restrictions were loosened, although international travel was heavily discouraged by the government with requirements for isolation remaining and restrictions on public servants engaging in non-essential international travel remaining. Following a second surge in August, Ireland again responded with harsh lockdowns, achieving one of the lowest COVID-19 prevalence rates worldwide by early December. This permitted a relatively wide reopening of travel in December 2020, which contributed to a third wave (O'Riordain, 2021).

In early 2021, as cases surged for the third time, harsh legal and operational measures were introduced to restrict international travel. These included a new statutory instrument relating to COVID-19 restrictions, fines for non-essential international travel increasing from €100 to €500 to €2,000, the introduction of mandatory hotel quarantine, including, for many European Union countries, suspension of holiday visas for specific countries and the requirement to arrive with a negative PCR COVID-19 test result. This was due to a sharp rise in cases in the January period, causing Ireland to have one of the fastest growth rates of COVID-19 instances anywhere in the world. Rising hospital admissions, numbers of patients in intensive care and sharply increasing death rates prompted severe national lockdowns and multiple restrictions on international travel.

In early 2021, the government introduced mandatory quarantine for all arriving international passengers, initially with a fourteen-day requirement to stay at home, with failure to comply penalised by fines of up to €2,500 and/or six months in prison (Department of the Taoiseach, 2021). Subsequently, travel to Ireland from specific designated states was subjected to mandatory hotel quarantine. Countries on this list variously included those with which Ireland would traditionally have strong outbound travel to, including the United States, France, Italy, and Canada. Travel to Ireland from these countries, while they remained on the mandatory hotel quarantine list, required the passenger to pre-book accommoda-

tion in designated hotels, to which they were escorted to on arrival by Óglaigh na hÉireann, the Irish Defence Forces. The quarantine period required single adults to pay a fee €1,875 for two weeks in a hotel, including meals, with a fee of €625 for each additional adult or their children who were aged 12-17. The fee for children aged 4-12 was €360, while no fee was charged for infants up to three years.

The inclusion of EU countries on the mandatory hotel quarantine list caused a publicly played out argument between the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Health (McGee, 2021a). The presence of European Union countries on the mandatory list further caused concern to the European Commission and other prominent figures. The media covered several complaints from EU ambassadors to Ireland, including, prominently, from the Italian ambassador (O'Leary, 2021). In April, Mr Paolo Serpi, in a widely circulated video, called the quarantine of Italian citizens "discriminatory" and "excessive", but Ireland's Minister for Health responded that he would make 'no apologies' for the measures. Over the coming weeks and months most European countries were removed, and with the removal of Belgium, France and Luxembourg on Friday, 28 May with immediate effect, no further European Union countries were on the list in summer 2021 (Department of the Taoiseach, 2021).

Throughout winter and spring 2021, senior politicians downplayed the possibility of travel reopening soon. In February 2021, the Tánaiste, Ireland's deputy prime minister, stated 'Maybe it will be the case that international travel is not possible this summer, this Christmas. I don't want to close off that possibility today, but maybe we'll have to' (Pope, 2021), while a few months later, in May, he stated that it would be August before travel reopened (McConnell, 2021a).

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of July 2021, Ireland finally fully commenced operation of the European Union's Digital COVID-19 Certificate (DCC), facilitating the return of inbound and outbound travel from an operational perspective. This document permits travellers who are vaccinated, recovered, or tested to cross borders without further restrictions using a QR code. While millions of certificates were issued in the week leading up to the 19<sup>th</sup> of July, the country was lagging behind all other European Union countries, all of which had launched the certificate on or by the 1<sup>st</sup> of July. Contradictory and confusing communications from the government were frequent during this period in relation to international travel. For example, on Wednesday, the 7<sup>th</sup> of July, the Department of the Taoiseach stated that children aged 7 and above needed to take a PCR test to fly to Ireland. This was in direct contradiction to a statement from the previous day when the Department of Health informed the Irish Times newspaper that children aged 12 and above only needed a PCR (Paul, 2021).

The official launch of the DCC on the 19<sup>th</sup> of July was also immediately beset with problems. In the first three days of launch, an underresourced staff handled less than 7% of 70,000 received calls (McQuinn, 2021). Tens of thousands of citi-

zens were unable to obtain help from the government helpline during these days due to delayed or missing certificates and incorrect information on certificates such as misspellings of names in the Irish language (Jones, 2021). One government party Senator noted at a health committee meeting that the incorrect translation of the certificate into the Irish language stated that the holder *had* COVID-19, as opposed to not having it (McGee, 2021b). Moreover, multiple media outlets additionally reported fully vaccinated Irish tourists subjected to mandatory hotel quarantine in Malta, due to only having a national record card of vaccination and not the full European DCC, due to delays with them being issued (Schengen Visa News, 2021; O'Regan, 2021; Burns & Wilson, 2021).

Four days after the launch of the certificate the government launched a website for residents who had acquired immunity through previous infection to request certification (Government of Ireland, 2021c). This was set up to reduce pressure on the phone lines, following complaints. However, this website too was beset with issues. The URL for the website contained a typo and was listed as [irishcovidcertificateportal.org](http://irishcovidcertificateportal.org), missing an 'i' in the word certificate. The error was quickly spotted by citizens, who set up a replica site redirecting users to the correct URL to avoid potential fraud (Cosgrave & Wilson, 2021) (see Fig. 2). After several media outlets reported on the error, the government URL was changed altogether the following day to [irishcovidcertportal.org](http://irishcovidcertportal.org), with links provided from the main government website (Government of Ireland, 2021c). Following a further week of complaints



Fig. 2. Screenshot of a website created by two Twitter users redirecting users to the correct government URL with its incorrect spelling, following the incorrect spelling of 'certificate'

Source: Government of Ireland, 2021c.



about 90-minute-plus wait times the government announced a new website would be built to handle requests for certificates (Kilraine, 2021).

A key legislative issue which restricted international travel was Ireland's refusal to utilise antigen tests, which can determine with high levels of accuracy whether the user has COVID-19. While the tests do not have the same level of accuracy as the gold standard PCR tests (Grover, 2021), they are widely utilised for travel throughout Europe (The European Union, 2021) as they give rapid results and are notably cheaper to administer. This issue was discussed prominently via the media with evident conflict between politicians, the public and NPHET, who did not support their use in Ireland, especially for socialising or travel. To demonstrate their distrust of the reliability of antigen tests, the Chair of the Modelling group of NPHET referred to them as 'snake oil', drawing a sharp public rebuke from a Professor of Immunology at Harvard (McGreevy, 2021). The tests were also criticised by the Minister for Health, prompting the same Harvard professor to say that he was 'sorry for Ireland' and that the government did not understand the science behind them. Moreover, and somewhat bizarrely, a consultant immunologist discussed rubbing butter on an antigen test in front of an Oireachtas Committee on Transport hearing (a legislative branch of government) to argue the tests could be easily manipulated to give a false negative. This action prompted an opposition politician to state that it demonstrated NPHET's distrust in the public (Ryan, 2021).

## 4. Industry decisions and impact

Commercial flight departures from Dublin airport to the European Union 28 in the first quarter of 2020 and 2021 illustrated the impact of the legislation, industry decisions and societal response. As the pandemic took hold in March 2020, the restrictions began to take hold with widespread flight cancellations. Dublin Airport passenger numbers in 2020 fell by 78%. This decline was comparable to similar large airports in proximity in Europe, with similar declines at Manchester Airport (76.9%), Gatwick (78%), Heathrow (72%) and Brussels (74%). Regional Irish airports were affected to an even greater extent, with passenger numbers handled by Cork Airport, for example, down 89.2% from Q3 in 2019 (Graham, 2021). May figures from the period 2017-2021 (Fig. 3) illustrate the impact into 2021 with connectivity suffering greatly during this period.

By July 2021, passenger numbers in Ireland continued to lag behind both EU counterparts and its 2019 figures. The number of flights on 22nd of July 2021, compared with that recorded exactly two years earlier had declined by 60%, with only 20,000 passengers on this date in 2021, compared to a daily average of 115,000 in

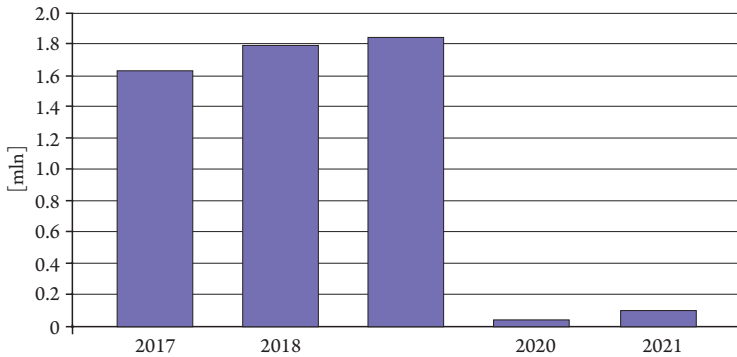


Fig. 3. Passenger departure numbers from all air and seaports, May 2017-2021

Source: Central Statistics Office, 2021a.

July 2019. This compared particularly unfavourably to the EU average, where air travel was less than 40% behind 2019 averages at this point. Ferries to and from France and the UK continued for the most part throughout the pandemic, given their role in supply chains, although with much lower passenger numbers.

As the scale of the pandemic became evident in spring 2020, several Irish-based airlines began to cancel flights in a widespread manner. Refunds, which should have been issued within a short time, were still being pursued months later by an angry customer base, who complained to their local politicians, court systems and on social media about their treatment (Pope, 2020). Ryanair, for example, offered customers cash refunds, subsequently changing their mind, and automatically issuing vouchers to customers. This was in contravention of Europe-wide EU261/2004 regulation, which required airlines to issue refunds. Ultimately, passengers did receive refunds, but many were still being pursued months later (The Irish Examiner, 2021).

Due to COVID-19, Aer Lingus decided to close its crew base at Shannon Airport in the Mid- West of Ireland in Spring 2021. At the point of making this decision Aer Lingus had estimated losses of €465 million euro due to the pandemic. The prompting local rallies calling on the government to change aviation policy to retain connectivity, help the industry recover and to save the airport (Flynn, 2021). The decision to withdraw from the airport was as much an economic shock as a financial one, as Aer Lingus, the former State-owned airline, had been flying from Shannon for over 80 years. Ryanair also made several route closure decisions (BBC, 2021b) which were blamed on government policies in relation to mandatory quarantine, vaccinations, and testing.

Throughout the pandemic there were multiple instances of publicly played out conflict between the travel industry lobby, the government and NPHE. Ryanair

were one of the more vocal critics, telling the government to “stop faffing around” with regards adoption of the European traffic light system for travel in October 2020 (McQuinn, 2020). This mode of public criticism from Ryanair throughout the pandemic, when, for example, they published an open letter to the Minister for Transport in June 2021, calling on him to explain why Ireland was not ready to comply with the DCC for travel (O’Halloran, 2021a). The letter also called the government ‘inept’ and warned that Ireland would be in breach of European Union law if it failed to accept the COVID-19 certificates for entry.

Conflict between public health advice and the travel industry continued into the summer months of 2021. Shortly prior to the introduction of the digital COVID-19 certificate the Chief Medical Officer stated that ‘there are plenty of good holiday opportunities in this country’ and that the unvaccinated should “not travel”, advice which was criticised by the President of the Irish Travel Agents Association as being against the spirit and terms of the digital COVID-19 certificate (Cullen, 2021). By July 2021, Dublin airport flight numbers compared unfavourably to other major European airports, when examining the 2021 figures against 2019 figures (see Table 2). Daily variation in Dublin on the 21<sup>st</sup> of July, for example, from 2019 to 2021, showed a decline of 62% in the number of flights. Declines for the ten busiest airports in Europe between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> of July ranged from 10% to 45%, less of a decline on average than Dublin during this period. By the first weekend of August 2021, national flight numbers were at only 40% of their 2019 volume, also significantly lower than the European Union average of 70% for the same period (O’Halloran, 2021b).

Table 2. Top 10 busiest airports 7-day average Dep/Ari flights on 14-21 July, compared to 2019

Airport	Number of daily Flights	Percentage decline 2021 VS 2019
Amsterdam	979	-17
IGA Istanbul Airport	927	-27
Paris/Charles-De-Gaulle	886	-42
Frankfurt	835	-45
Madrid/Barajas	754	-41
Antalya	739	-20
Palma De Mallorca	714	-20
Athens	650	-21
Barcelona	627	-42
Istanbul/Sabiha Gokcen	598	-10

Source: EuroControl, 2021.

## 4. Societal response and media influence

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the Irish media profiled several cases of COVID-19 spread in relation to international travel. In the early stages of the pandemic, the media included frequent reference to Irish outbound travel to the Cheltenham horse racing festival in the United Kingdom. 20,000 Irish tourists attended this four-day event from the 10<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> of March 2020. Media commentary on whether or not the festival should have gone ahead appeared in *The Guardian* (Wood, 2020), *The Irish Independent* (Riegel, 2020), *RTE* (RTE, 2020b) and *The Irish Times* (Wood & Carroll, 2020), with attendees criticised for travelling and race organisers receiving strong disapproval not cancelling the event. One *Irish Times* article captured the mood with their headline ‘Cheltenham 2020: ‘Face-masks were as rare as a 100-1 winner’ Racing journalist Brian O’Connor looks back on the ‘glorified Petri dish’ that was Cheltenham 2020’ (O’Connor, 2021a).

Multiple high-profile stories regarding travel and COVID-19 continued to be published throughout summer 2020. In August, for example, the Chairperson of Failte Ireland, Ireland’s national tourism authority, resigned from his position after the media reported that he was on a holiday visiting family in Italy (BBC, 2020c). Although Italy was a green list country, which it was permissible to visit on the system utilised by the government at the time, and although the chairperson role is not remunerated, the Minister for Tourism stated she was ‘disappointed’ with his actions and accepted his resignation. Similar comments emerged from industry bodies and opposition parties, who variously called it ‘shocking optics’, ‘a crass error of judgement’, and ‘unbelievable’ (Horgan-Jones, 2020). Weeks later, another board member resigned after the media reported she had spent time in Spain during the summer, where she owned a second property (Gataveckaite, 2020).

Throughout the pandemic the media frequently quoted opposition politicians and members of the Independent Scientific Advocacy Group (ISAG), who persistently called for a zero- COVID-19 strategy to replicate the approach of New Zealand in sealing its borders to the vast majority international travel (O’Sullivan, 2021). Measures advocated to deter outbound travel included strict outside-the-home mandatory quarantine for all travel, and additional restrictions, such as the creation of bubbles in border counties beside Northern Ireland (O’Riordain, 2021). One Senator accused the ISAG group of attempting to instil fear, and after internal leaked correspondence, called on members to ‘look for ways to increase insecurity, anxiety and uncertainty’ (Bradley, 2021), as ‘people hurt faster than institutions’ (McConnell, 2021b).

Further tweets from group members demonstrated their desire for mandatory quarantine and stricter measures.

We keep delaying the introduction of even half-hearted mandatory hotel quarantine & meanwhile the virus goes on. If P.1 [a covid variant] establishes itself here we are in real trouble. The virus was introduced & reintroduced by travel, but we don't have this basic PH [public health] measure. (McLysaght, 2021)

Confusing and sometimes incorrect information was on occasion published by the media in relation to travel. For example, an article published in the Irish Times on 7<sup>th</sup> of June 2021 stated that *'A ban making "non-essential" travel illegal and quarantines demanding that passengers from the US and several EU countries stay in hotels for two weeks, are among tough measures that remain in place in the Republic'* (O'Halloran, 2021b). This statement was despite all remaining European Union countries and the United States having been removed from the mandatory hotel quarantine list on the 28<sup>th</sup> of May with immediate effect, ten days prior (Department of the Taoiseach, 2021).

Finally, one of the most prominent media COVID-19 travel stories during the early period of 2021 related to two women from Dublin who travelled to Dubai. On return, subject to prevailing regulations, both women were mandated to go into hotel quarantine. The women refused to enter quarantine and their solicitor said "his clients were not aware of the regulations before they travelled to Dubai for breast augmentation surgery" (BBC, 2021b). The women were sent to prison, charged with breaching Section 38 of the Health Act, but were subsequently released after the high court amended their bail conditions and on agreement that they would return to hotel quarantine (O'Faolain, 2021).

## 5. Analysis and discussion

Despite regulations, industry decisions and media influence on non-essential travel, throughout the pandemic Irish residents utilised multiple 'backdoors' to continue accessing international trips abroad. A prominently covered route included travel for dental treatment. Regulations permitted departure for loosely defined essential reasons, including for travellers with arranged dental treatment or seeking dental treatment (S.I. No. 217, 2021). This exception facilitated a spike in Irish residents seeking dental treatment overseas, presumably most of which was non-essential given the subsequent low uptake of the appointments.

Dentists in the Canary Islands, for example, stopped taking bookings from Irish residents during February 2021, after reporting up to 15 bookings per day, followed by no-shows on appointment day (Pogatchnik, 2021). An Garda Síochána, Ireland's police force warned that while they did not view the practice of travelling abroad for dental treatment as reasonable, they only had limited powers to stop it (Gallagher, 2021).

Other backdoors facilitated international travel, particularly to the United Kingdom. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of May 2021, for example, Ireland loosened national restrictions, thus facilitating inter-country travel, and confirmed by the government that this included travel to Northern Ireland (Libreri, 2021). The open border between Ireland and Northern Ireland therefore meant that Irish citizens could access airports in Northern Ireland for departures and arrivals, while continuing to be fined €2,000 for non-essential travel to Dublin airport and other Irish airports and ports. In theory fines could be levied for non-essential travel via Northern Ireland, but in practice there was no reporting of this occurring. The open backdoor was also reported on widely as per dental treatments, with the Irish Times, for example, reporting a *'Lucrative Dublin run for taxi drivers as quarantine dodgers fly to Belfast'* (McClements, 2021).

Globally, international tourist arrivals were down 83% in the first quarter in comparison to 2020 (The UNWTO, 2021) and by the end of summer 2021, COVID-19 was responsible for c195million cases and more than four million deaths (The Visual and Data Journalism Team, the BBC, 2021). It is clear the virus itself was evidently the direct cause of the sharp decline in outbound travel, rather than specifically legislation, industry decisions or media and societal influence. In an Irish context, it must be stated that the policy, commercial decisions and media influence were but three of the internal factors influencing the collapse in outbound travel numbers, but there are myriad external factors not considered in this article, including for example, the cancellation of events frequently attended by Irish tourists abroad, the arrival restrictions in other countries, and the discouraging of international arrivals in other countries through societal and media influence.

While Ireland's decline in outbound travel largely reflected the global collapse in the tourism industry, the State was, for the most part of the first eighteen months, situated at the extreme end of European metrics, as demonstrated by contrasting aviation figures, departures, travel fines, and the pace of recovery. This present exploration of the restrictions and their impacts presents three key findings, which provide lessons for policy makers, industry, and society.

An important consideration is that it is imperative for the three stakeholders to reduce the public nature of conflict. Publicly played out conflicts between government departments, between government and international partners, between government and society, between consumers and industry and between government and industry were evident at multiple points throughout the pandemic. Conflict is likely to be healthy in the context of a crisis, especially as alternative viewpoints can help creativity in an uncertain world (Eisenhardt, Kahwajy, & Bourgeois 1987) and it may therefore help craft strong policy. There is a concern among industry (O'Connor, 2021b) that such prominent positioning of travel as a 'villainous' facilitator of COVID-19 unnecessarily attacked the sector. Further

research would be required to assess if this positioning will slow recovery, leaving an unwanted legacy from the pandemic.

Second, it is imperative that communications are improved in future crises management situations in Ireland. Tackling misinformation is a stated aim of the European Union (European Commission, 2021), yet when both the mainstream media and the government are issuing outdated, inaccurate, contradictory, or simply confusing messaging, it is unlikely to build trust among the general population. Trust is essential in the management of a nation's health and while Irish government and society has been praised for its exemplary response to the pandemic itself (Horgan-Jones, 2021) and its vaccination rates (Moloney, 2021), there are clearly lessons which can be learned for mitigating economic damage. It is also impossible for travellers to plan with any accuracy about what they can or cannot do if government ministers are issuing widely publicised contradictory statements in relation to travel. Again, this lesson prompts consideration of an opportunity for further research. It is critical to understand the trust-travel-crisis nexus to mitigate damage in future crisis management situations and research on traveller intentions, crisis management techniques and communication flows offer rich seams for exploration.

Finally, there are lessons to be learned in terms of responsiveness of measures, particularly in the context of volatility, exposure, resilience, and adaptation. It is clear, for example, that aspects of travel restrictions had a positive impact on reducing virus circulation in Ireland. However, many of the restrictions received criticism for their timing, being brought in either too late to reduce viral circulation or not being removed quickly enough to mitigate economic damage. Furthermore, it is not clear why the launch of the Digital COVID-19 Certificate was so beset with problems, given that it had been in preparation across Europe for some time. Reviews and reflections on the processes used to launch the certificate should be conducted to ensure information technology capacity and responsiveness is improved when faced with a crisis.

## 6. Outlook

The long-term outlook for the outbound Irish tourism market is generally positive as of August 2021. With strong social connectivity across Europe, ongoing government supports, a higher rate of vaccination uptake than the EU average (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, 2021), pent up demand, and strong intentions to travel (Allen, 2021), it is likely the sector will rebound. Both Ryanair and Aer Lingus, responsible for most of the outbound traffic from Ireland, have indicated they expect the sector to recover within two to three years (Hoare, 2021). The Central Statistics Office published a survey in June 2021,

based on primary research from April-May 2021, indicating 47.3% of respondents planned an international trip in 2021, with a further 34.5% planning one in 2022 and 18.2% not planning to travel within this period (Central Statistics Office, 2021b). This provides a generally positive picture, although the survey was conducted prior to challenges with the DCC and enhanced news coverage of the Delta COVID-19 variant. Further reflections will be required on the management of pandemic related travel in the coming years as we emerge from the crisis.

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## Konflikt i chaos na przykładzie irlandzkiego rynku podróży zagranicznych w czasie pandemii

**Streszczenie.** Podczas pandemii COVID-19 międzynarodowy rynek podróży zagranicznych z Irlandii całkowicie się załamał, odnotowując w pewnym momencie spadek o 94%. Autor opisuje okoliczności, które towarzyszyły temu załamaniu, wskazując na dominującą w owym czasie atmosferę konfliktu i chaosu. Głównym celem artykułu jest udokumentowanie i przeanalizowanie czynników prawnych, branżowych i społecznych, które mogły przyczynić się do załamania rynku

turystycznego, wskazanie kluczowych przepisów, decyzji, wskaźników i reakcji społecznych oraz zbadanie ich wpływu na turystykę wyjazdową. Przedmiotem analizy są trzy obszary, a mianowicie: 1) instrumenty prawne stosowane przez rząd w celu ograniczenia podróży, 2) decyzje podejmowane przez branżę turystyczną oraz 3) reakcja społeczeństwa i mediów na pandemię. Przedstawione wnioski to wynik analizy danych zastanych. Po pierwsze, zdaniem autora, konflikty i spory dotyczące działań podejmowanych przez rząd i służbę zdrowia, główne media i branżę turystyczną dałoby się rozwiązywać znacznie skuteczniej na płaszczyźnie prywatnej zamiast toczyć je na łamach artykułów prasowych, w mediach społecznościowych lub w formie listów otwartych publikowanych w prasie. Po drugie, wszystkie trzy strony powinny poprawić przejrzystość swojej komunikacji, mając na uwadze jej wpływ na zaufanie konsumentów. Autor proponuje też szereg wniosków, które rząd może wyciągnąć z tego doświadczenia z myślą o zarządzaniu przyszłymi sytuacjami kryzysowymi w odniesieniu do podróży zagranicznych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Irlandia, COVID-19, zarządzanie kryzysowe, media i społeczeństwo, zarządzanie, ograniczenia, ustawodawstwo



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