5 Terrorism and tourism revisited

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The objectives of this chapter are to:

☐   Demonstrate that international terrorism and tourism share some characteristics in that they cross and go beyond national borders, involve citizens from different countries and use the latest travel and communication technologies;

☐   Show how terrorists often use tourism in order to gain the publicity and support needed to achieve their goals;

☐   Highlight that tourists are often chosen as targets for their symbolic value with terrorists turning them into valuable assets to be explored.

Keywords: terrorism, tourism industry, safety, security, risk perception, terrorism attacks

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Introduction

Tourism activity is perhaps the best example of the experience economy (Quan & Wang, 2004), as the experience is the core product in the travel industry (Tsaur et al., 2007). Tourists are customers emotionally as well as rationally compelled (Schmitt, 1999), concerned with accomplishing pleasurable and memorable experiences. More than products, tourists desire satisfying experiences (Tsaur et al., 2007). Terrorism and the perceived risk associated with attacks can damage the image of destinations and therefore can affect negatively tourism experiences and behaviors (Seabra et al., 2014).

Tourism demand is particularly sensitive to tourists' concerns about their safety, health and well-being (Blake & Sinclair, 2003). However, although natural disasters have a significant impact on tourists' behaviors, terrorist attacks have a more intimidating role for tourists (Sönmez, 1998). In fact, risk perceptions on personal safety can be a crucial factor influencing the image, and the choice of a destination. Some studies go even further, confirming that a terrorist act can influence negatively not only the image of the affected destination, but also of the neighboring sites, leading to a negative global image in an entire region (Kozak et al., 2007). In addition, past research concluded that risk perception in travelling is crucial in travel planning behavior independently of tourists' cultural background and country of origin (Seabra et al., 2013). In fact tourists from countries with different levels of safety consider travel safety as a critical issue and that it influences directly international trip decisions and behaviors, especially in what regards to terrorism and political instability risk (Seabra et al., 2018).

Terrorism has become an important and recurring topic in the public discourse in the 21st century. In its domestic and international form, it is carried out by revolutionary groups and vigilantes, being a constant in modern societies (Feichtinger et al., 2001). In these last few decades, terrorism has entered in the media discourse – and at the same time into public opinion – causing a feeling of general insecurity and unsafety in people's daily life everywhere, anytime (Seabra et al., 2014). In fact, terrorists are very conscious of the importance of public opinion, planning their attacks accordingly by "choosing the time, location or target that will make the strongest impact on the public" (Malečková & Stanišić, 2014: 632). Terrorists continue to select vulnerable and defenseless targets (Atkinson et al., 1987) to achieve their goals.

Tourists have been examples, in recent years, of this vulnerability and represent targets that have become more and more desirable (Seabra et al., 2014). A terrorist attack targeting tourists can help its authors to achieve several objectives: advertising, economic threat, and ideological opposition to tourism, among others (Sönmez, 1998). The awareness of the human costs associated with the recent terrorist events and the redirection of economic resources, presumably driven by perceived risks associated with future terrorist incidents, have led to a concentration of efforts, by various tourism organizations, to improve their understanding of terrorism and of its consequences on this industry (Blomberg et al., 2004).

The tourism industry is one of the activities that suffer most from terrorist activity. "The adverse economic effects of terrorism on the tourism sector are felt by all countries where terrorist attacks occur, regardless of whether or not these incidents are aimed at tourists" (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2016: 67). Terrorism targeting the tourism sector represents heavy costs directly by decreasing tourist arrivals and receipts, which will affect and cause a decrease in those countries' GDP; indirectly employment in tourism and other related industry sectors will decrease as well (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2016).

In this context, the increased exposure to significant political, economic, social and technological losses and the terrorist threat lead to a higher vigilance from tourism companies and managers so they might be able to deal with impending crises. The understanding of the terrorism phenomenon and of its impacts makes it possible to develop more effective strategies to stop or reduce the severity of their impacts, both on the economy and on society (Ritchie, 2004). Based on an extensive literature and data analysis, this chapter's main goal is to make an important contribution to science and management by analyzing the terrorism phenomenon, specifically its connection with the tourist industry. It is our aim to update the pioneer work of Sönmez (1998) and help to connect the dots between terrorism and tourism, answering the question: what connects tourism and terrorism?

Terrorism: A puzzling phenomenon

Terrorism is a puzzling phenomenon that has attracted researchers' attention in various study fields. Hoping to understand and control these occurrences, as well as their adverse effects, governments, organizations and academic communities have made efforts to understand it. However, this is not a simple task. The topic is so troublesome and studied in so many perspectives that conceptually there is no universally accepted definition for terrorism (Poland, 1988). The often-quoted cliché that "one person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter" shows the different points of view and the definition problems that this concept entails (Sönmez & Graefe, 1998b). The definition of terrorism has raised quite a buzz among researchers and organizations over the years. There is no unanimity on the definition only "the lack of consensus in the literature on the determinants of terrorism" (Savun & Phillips, 2009: 879). The following table systematizes some of the various definitions that have been proposed over the last three decades for the terrorism concept.

Table 5.1: Definitions of terrorism

National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism[1] (2016)
The threats or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation.
Fenstermacher, Kuznar, Rieger and Speckhard (2010)
Fundamentally, terrorism occurs when non-state organizations employ violence for political purposes and when the target of that violence is civilian (or military in non-combat settings), and the immediate purpose is to instill fear in a population.
Scheffler (2006)
Terrorism is a prima facie evil, and that the use of terrorist tactics is presumptively unjustified, it may sometimes be a response to policies that are also unjustified and which may be as objectionable as the terrorist response itself.
Goldblatt and Hu (2005)
Illegal usage of force or acting of violence against persons or their properties in order to intimidate its own Government, the citizenship or any other segment of society.
Tavares (2004)
Terrorist activities are expressions of the demand for change of certain groups who are dissatisfied with the political status-quo and who have abandoned the constitutional means.
UN Security Council (2004)
Criminal acts, including those carried out against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury, or taking of hostages, with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the general public or in a group of persons or particular persons, intimidate a population or compel a government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act.
Fullerton, Ursano, Norwood and Holloway (2003)
The most powerful way to generate psychological fear, apprehension and disruption in the functioning of societies and communities.
Radu (2002)
Any attack or threat of attack against unarmed targets with the objective of influence, change or condition major policy decisions. The attacks are mostly against large civilians targets to create fear.
Enders and Sandler (2002)
Use of threat or use of premeditated violence or unusual brutality by sub-national groups to achieve political, religious or ideological goals through intimidation of a huge audience, usually not directly involved with the politicians that terrorists aim to influence.
Hirsch, Kett and Trefil (2002)
Acts of violence committed by groups that view themselves as victimized by some notable historical wrong. Although these groups have no formal connection with governments, they usually have the financial and moral backing of sympathetic governments. Typically, they stage unexpected attacks on civilian targets, including embassies and airliners, with the aim of sowing fear and confusion.