



International Journal of Tourism Cities

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Andres Coca-Stefaniak, Alastair M. Morrison,

Article information:

To cite this document:

Andres Coca-Stefaniak, Alastair M. Morrison, (2018) "City tourism destinations and terrorism – a worrying trend for now, but could it get worse?", International Journal of Tourism Cities, Vol. 4 Issue: 4, pp.409-412, <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJTC-12-2018-099>

Permanent link to this document:

<https://doi.org/10.1108/IJTC-12-2018-099>

Downloaded on: 30 November 2018, At: 14:10 (PT)

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City tourism destinations and terrorism – a worrying trend for now, but could it get worse?

The advent of the tragic events of 9/11 in the USA and subsequent terrorism attacks in global tourism cities such as Paris, Brussels, Berlin, Istanbul, London and Barcelona, to mention but a few, have resulted in major challenges for the tourism sector, including the events industry in cities. Although terrorism attacks continue to increase in number and magnitude, the phenomenon is hardly new historically, and scholars have suggested that the concept of organised terror on a wide-scale stretches as far back as the French Revolution in the eighteenth century or even some of the war tactics employed by Genghis Khan, ruler of the largest empire in history in the thirteenth century (see Edgell and Swanson, 2019). Academic research on the impact of terrorism on tourism has developed substantially over the last two decades both in terms of its breadth and depth as a reflection of the new world order we continue to navigate today.

Although a number of studies have analysed the impact of security concerns linked to terrorism on the events industry (e.g. Hu and Goldblatt, 2005; Gordon *et al.*, 2008) and tourism (see Sönmez and Graefe, 1998; Goodrich, 2002), their scope to date remains somewhat limited with some considering economic impact (e.g. Pizam and Smith, 2000), visitor risk perceptions (e.g. Fuchs and Reichel, 2011), dark tourism (e.g. Seraphin, 2017), social theory (e.g. Mansfeld and Pizam, 2006) or tourism demand (e.g. Araña and León, 2008), with very few adopting a more strategic outlook as regards tourism destinations (e.g. Beirman, 2003; Paraskevas and Arendell, 2007). This themed issue of the *International Journal of Tourism Cities (IJTC)* seeks to redress this balance by tackling a major knowledge gap in our understanding of the longer term impacts of terrorism on the resilience of tourism destination brands (see Avraham, 2015), their overall competitiveness in the global tourism market and their attractiveness to major international investors.

A recent study by Deloitte (2017) showed that most members of Generation Y – also known as the millennials – ranked “war, terrorism and political tension” as a top concern above healthcare, hunger, unemployment or the environment, to mention some of the highest ranked categories. This sentiment was more prevalent among young people in mature economies (56 per cent), particularly in Northern Europe, and less so (42 per cent) among people living in emerging economies. Similarly, a recent UK-based survey of the following generation – often referred to as “centennials” or “Generation Z” – showed that terrorism was a concern to 70 per cent of them, though unemployment claimed the top spot at 79 per cent (Hertz, 2016).

Although these two generations are not necessarily the tourism industry’s most affluent market segments yet, they are poised to shape and influence the industry’s medium-term prospects. All this whilst terrorism continues its likely development into a global phenomenon, no longer limited to a handful of high-risk destinations – for instance, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria or Syria – with a limited tourism sector (see Sharpley, 2018). Although research in tourist behaviour has shown that perceived risk, particularly linked to terrorism or potential armed conflict, is a key factor affecting tourists’ travel decision-making processes, this body of knowledge has not hitherto addressed the influence of tourists’ country of origin on this decision-making process.

This themed issue of the *IJTC* starts with an article by Seabra *et al.* (“Peacefulness at home: impacts on international travel”), which investigates tourists’ travel decision-making influenced by the level of peacefulness in their own countries of origin. The findings have major implications for

tourism destination marketing to established outbound tourism markets (including the rather apprehensive young customer base in Northern Europe alluded to earlier) but, crucially, growing tourism from emerging economies with a lower ranking in the Global Peace Index and where younger generations seem to be somewhat less concerned by terrorism (Deloitte, 2017). Isaac and Velden's article "The German source market perceptions: how risky is Turkey to travel to?" offers similar insights related to perception of risk related to political instability and conflict, though from the perspective of an older generation (50–59 years of age). Similarly, Veréb *et al.*'s article "The fear of terrorism and shift in cosmopolitan values" indicates that the resilience of travellers' cosmopolitan convictions should not be underestimated as these personal values were found to be closely related to perceptions of risk in destinations facing terrorism threats. However, it is likely that our age of anxiety – partly induced by fear of terrorism – may yet test this resilience to new levels and, once broken, the authors point out that the resulting value shift in new generations of tourists could render long-term consequences for the tourism industry as a result of a growing preference for security in detriment of stimulation.

As Havari (2018) posits in his bestseller book *21 Lessons for the twenty first Century*, a key vulnerability to terrorism by modern states and public sentiment linked to this rests on the very premise of those states' legitimacy being based on their promise to keep the public sphere free of political violence, including terrorism. In line with this, the tragic deaths of a few people in Belgium, Nice or Barcelona will regretfully tend to draw comparatively higher levels of attention than the deaths of hundreds of victims of terrorism in Nigeria, Iraq, Yemen or Somalia, to mention but a few "hot spot" examples. Now, given that the words "public sentiment" remain key in this argument, how would rumoured or imaginary events (e.g. fake news) linked to terrorism impact the brand image of tourism cities in our post-truth world? Moreover, do the metaphoric ripples of these fake news via social media and online news media platforms bear a resemblance to the (physical) waves of an earthquake as a physical disaster "terror" event generated by nature itself? A study in this issue of *IJTC* by Cassinger and Eksell on "The narrative rhythm of terror: a study of the Stockholm terrorist attack and the 'Last Night in Sweden' event" uses rhythm analysis to examine how urban space is mediated through digital media flows and concludes that imaginary terror attacks in a digital environment actually have a greater impact on the narratives of a tourism city than a real terrorist attack. In some ways, this digital PR-based concept linked to an (imaginary) terrorist attack could be interpreted as a new – and perversely more advanced – form of cyber-terrorism in as much as it would serve exactly the same purpose as more standard (and arguably more costly) cyber-terrorism or physical terrorist attacks: to spread fear and anxiety among people. Putting the study's findings into a wider perspective, it could be argued that they could represent an early warning to the potential vulnerability of smart cities and smart tourism destinations to breaches in the security, reliability and credibility of their data and information flow networks.

The topic of information management and communication strategies within the European context of tourism cities subject to a terrorist attack is also explored in this issue by Barbe *et al.* in their article "Destinations response to terrorism on Twitter". This study brings to the forefront an even more worrying weakness than vulnerability – inaction in the midst of a crisis. Indeed, evidence delivered by this study shows that some destination management organisations (DMOs) in major European destinations actually went offline – as regards Twitter activity – in the days immediately following a terrorist attack striking at their hearts. If local communities in tourism cities across the globe expect tourists to behave more responsibly, it would also seem appropriate for local or regional tourism authorities to reciprocate accordingly (Morrison, 2019), particularly with regards to the safety and welfare of those tourists (and residents) in line with basic principles of duty of care. It follows from this that tourism should be treated very much as an open system (Morrison *et al.*, 2018) with DMOs having a much wider role than originally thought. This role includes handling negative publicity as part of their PR and communication functions. Indeed, it would appear that the flexibility and adaptability of an open systems approach would be particularly well suited to the dynamic and constantly evolving external influences on tourism destinations, which include politics, technology, terrorism, crime, disease and demographics, to mention but a few. It is against this backdrop that Baxter *et al.*'s article "Plan for the worst, hope for the best? Exploring major events related terrorism and future challenges for UK event professionals" offers insights into UK-based practitioner dilemmas and challenges related to risk-informed priorities for the organisation of major events.

Our understanding of public attitudes towards terrorism both at home and abroad continues to be plagued with gaps and, as a result of this, this topic remains a fertile area for academic research (e.g. Allouche and Lind, 2010). Regardless of its motive and geographical target(s), terrorism – including the many nuances surrounding this concept – is likely to evolve and escalate over the next decades into more sophisticated or lethal forms, including cyber-terrorism affecting infrastructures and information/knowledge hubs, chemical and biological terrorism (including the not-so-distant possibility of transmitting physical viruses through digital channels), radioactive terrorism (e.g. “dirty” bomb) and, ultimately, nuclear terrorism. Unfortunately, tourism will remain largely a “soft target” in this respect due to the very nature of the industry and its sheer diversity. Nevertheless, as modern states continue to protect their legitimacy based on their promise to keep the public sphere free of political violence, the challenge will be for tourism to stop being the Achilles heel of this open system. More specifically, DMOs and their key stakeholders (including events professionals) in tourism cities will need to develop effective strategies to minimise risk on this front with crisis management contingency plans along the same lines of existing regulations related to workplace safety. Increasingly, governance aspects of DMOs in cities will involve the gathering, processing and sharing of intelligence data, which may increase the resilience of tourism cities to terrorism. Parallel to these operations management elements, the PR-based battle for the hearts and minds of tourists and visitors will continue, through using much more sophisticated branding techniques. This special issue of *IJTC* on “Terrorism in Tourism Cities” offers insights to some of these issues and offers suggestions for further research in this field. On a broader level, the message of this special issue intends to be one of hope rather than apprehension. Perhaps the words of the late Pope John Paul II, a victim of terrorism himself but also a great thinker and traveller, would seem appropriate here:

The world is becoming a global village in which people from different continents are made to feel like next door neighbours. In facilitating more authentic social relationships between individuals, tourism can help overcome many real prejudices, and foster new bonds of fraternity. In this sense tourism has become a real force for world peace (Pope John Paul II, 1985).

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