Terrorism and tourism in France: The limitations of dark tourism

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this viewpoint article is to discuss whether or not dark tourism can be developed around the sites of recent terrorist attacks in France.

Design/methodology/approach: The article is based on a literature review of key terms: dark tourism; tourism; terrorism.

Findings: The article observes that dark tourism is not popular in France and dark tourism activities are unlikely to develop anywhere nearer the places where the recent terrorist attacks happened. France remains rather conservative in some aspects related to death.

Practical implications: Recent events in France might challenge the leadership of the destination. The disturbing commonalities between tourism and terrorism make it difficult to figure out suitable recovery strategies that would contribute to enhancing the image of the destination without jeopardising the life of civilians.

Originality/value: This paper presents France as a politically unstable tourist destination. In general, this scenario is normally associated with less developed countries or non-established tourist destinations.

Keywords: France, tourism, terrorism, dark tourism, culture

Paper type: Viewpoint

Dark tourism: A systematic outcome?

Korstanje and Clayton (2012) established some clear links between terrorism and tourism: Both need modern technology to be effective; both rely on media; and both require the manipulation of perceptions and attitudes. They also identified a major difference between both: Terrorism is about actively planning the deaths of others, whereas tourism is about enjoying life and refusing to have one's holiday plans disrupted by anything (even terrorism). That said, Korstanje and Clayton did not explicitly highlight the interdependent relationship between terrorism and tourism. Popular tourist destinations in the world provide victims for terrorists (Sonmez & Graefe, 1998) and in exchange, deaths related to terrorist activities contribute to the sacralisation of iconic sites that become commercialised as tourism products (Korstanje & Clayton, 2012). Further Korstanje and Clayton (2012) concluded that there is a link between terrorism and the form of tourism associated with death more commonly known as 'dark tourism', but they did not address the limitations of dark tourism as a commercial activity. Taking the example of France, it is the most popular tourist destination in the world (in terms of number of visitors) that has been hit on numerous occasions in recent years by terrorist attacks. Given this reality, it is legitimate to consider whether dark tourism is likely to be become a popular form of tourism. The answer could support Korstanje and Clayton (2012) who

present dark tourism as a systematic outcome of terrorism and their claim about 'the extraordinary resilience and adaptability of the tourism industry' (Korstanje & Clayton, 2012: 20). A negative response would tend towards the view of Getz (2008) who concluded that the tourism industry is vulnerable to terrorism and other extreme events.

The tourism industry in France

The tourism industry started to play a major role in the French economy in 1936 with the first paid holidays. Factors like the constant growth of the population; the emergence of the traveller's cheque; the affordable cost of holidays, etc. also played a role in the development of this industry in France (Séraphin, 2011). Séraphin (2011) highlighted some other key dates in the history of the tourism industry in France. In 1909, the first theme park (Luna Park) opened in France (followed in 1992 by Disney Paris, and in 2000, the Futuroscope). By 2011, there were 75 theme parks in France. The second key date is 1950, with the opening of the first holiday resort: 'Club Méditerranée'. This company is the symbol of the beginning and the development of mass tourism. The third key date is 1966 with the creation of the first French Tour Operator (T.O) 'Nouvelles Frontieres' founded by Jacques Maillot. This T.O made a significant contribution to the development of mass tourism. The next key date is 1967, with the creation of the hospitality industry band Accor Corporation by Paul Dubrule and Gerard Pelisson. This chain of hotels, due to the quality of service

provided, helped to attract visitors to France. Today, this company is like a worldwide ambassador of the French 'savoir faire'. The French gastronomy and 'Art de vivre' also contribute tremendously to the positive image of the country at an international level. Although France has been the leading tourist destination since 1985 in terms of number of visitors, the destination is ranked third (behind the US and Spain) in terms of income generated by the industry.

The achievements of France as a tourist destination since 1985, and even its current performance (WTO, 2015): 83.8 million visitors and 43.2 billion Euros in 2014, provide evidence that: economic and political stability, the absence of natural disaster and the outbreak of disease; the wellbeing of a population; the ability of people to dream to be entrepreneurial and safety and security are some of the essential criteria for the sustainable development of the tourism industry of a destination (Wagner, 2015; Gay, 2008; Ritchie, Dorrell, Miller & Miller, 2004). Talking about the French Overseas Department and Regions (Guadeloupe, French Guiana, Martinique, and Reunion Island) and French Overseas Collectivities (Mayotte, Saint Martin, Saint Barthelemy, French Polynesia, Wallis and Futuna, Saint-Pierre and Miquelon), Gay (2008) identified the good level of safety of these destinations as being a competitive advantage. In the Caribbean for instance, Gay (2008) indicates that tourists tend sometimes to avoid destinations like Jamaica, Dominican Republic, the Bahamas and Trinidad and Tobago because they are perceived to be dangerous

locations from a safety and security standpoint. That said, Jamaica remained the third most visited island of the Caribbean (CTO, 2014). This case provides evidence of the contradictory and ambiguous nature of the tourism industry. On that basis, it is legitimate to wonder whether or not the terrorist attacks that happened in France are going to jeopardize its leadership and the nature of its tourism industry.

France and terrorism

Terrorism that began to make headlines around the world in the 70s and reached its peak in the mid-80s (Sonmez & Graefe, 1998: 113) can be defined as an illegal use of force or act of political violence utilised when one of the opposed factions is not able to overcome their enemy militarily. The goal may be to force the other side to concede by inflicting more casualties and damage than they can bear; to turn citizens of a country against their own government reminding them that their government can't protect them; or to intimidate the Government, the citizenship or other society stakeholder groups. Terrorism is mostly the result of conflict of perceptions, hence its symbolic meaning for its perpetrators as an attempt to reinterpret or revise historical events in support of an ideology (Saint-Pierre, 2003; Goldblatt & Hu, 2005, cited in Korstanje & Clayton, 2012).

As for France, Gregory (2003) explained that France has had a long history of struggle with various forms of terrorism. He even added that 'ever since the

anarchist August Vaillant first threw a bomb into the French parliament on 9 December 1893, the modern French state has been subject to politically motivated violence' (Gregory, 2003: 124). Some of the attacks are indigenous terrorist threats like the one from Corsica with the Front de Liberation National de la Corse (FLNC); others are against the French Government but happen outside French territory like the hijacking of an Air France Airbus A320 (with 236 passengers and crew aboard) from Algiers to Paris at Algiers airport by the Groupes Islamistes Armees (GIA) on 24 December 1994 (Gregory, 2003). The history of struggles that France has had in the past with terrorism (Gregory, 2003) has become a permanent threat to the safety of French citizens and tourists visiting the country. Among the most recent terrorist attacks in France, we can mention:

Normandy, France, July 26, 2016: Two attackers seized hostages in a church near the Normandy city of Rouen on Tuesday, killing one hostage by slitting his throat before being killed by police (Indianexpress, 2016 [Online]).

Nice, France, July 14, 2016: A man driving a truck, ploughed into a crowd that was celebrating Bastille Day in Nice (French Riviera), killing at least 84 and injuring hundred others. Islamic State claimed the attack (Indianexpress, 2016 [Online])

Paris, France, November 13, 2015: Three suicide bombings outside the national sport stadium in France during an international game. Subsequent shootings

took place at the Bataclan, a music venue. A total of 129 killed and 352 people injured (Euronews, 2016 [Online])

Paris, France, January 7, 2015: Brothers Kouachi shot dead 11 people at the Paris office of French Satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo (Euronews, 2016 [Online])

Based on the fact that political instability can be defined as 'a situation in which conditions and mechanisms of governance and rule are challenged by elements operating from outside of the moral operations of the political system' (Hall and O'Sullivan (1996: 106, cited in Korstanje & Clayton, 2012) and because 'terrorism has been identified as a dimension of political instability along with international and civil wars, coups, riots, social unrest, and strikes' (Hall and O'Sullivan, 1996: 106, cited in Korstanje & Clayton, 2012), France can be considered as a politically unstable tourist destination. On that basis, it is not farfetched to assume that the tourism industry is going to suffer from this new status. The following section investigates the impacts of these attacks on tourism in France.

Impacts of terrorism on the tourism industry

Among the most obvious impacts of terrorism on the tourism industry is the change of travel plans by tourists which subsequently impact on the revenue of the destination and professionals like hoteliers who have to offer discounts to encourage visitors to return (Sonmez & Graefe, 1998). The other impact of

terrorism on the tourism industry is the loss of life of tourists. Considered as ambassadors of their country's values, tourists are obvious and easy targets for terrorists (Sonmez & Graefe, 1998). The change of image profile of the destination is another consequence of terrorism (Arana & Leon, 2008). As with any tourist destination, France is impacted by the above consequences of terror and violence. This section provides another opportunity to highlight the ambiguous nature of tourism. If on a one hand, tourism and tourists can be considered as the origin of terrorism (Sonmez & Graefe, 1998), there is also literature that supports the notion that tourism can be a vector of peace and the idea of peace through tourism is gaining ground. Tourism can contribute to knowledge of foreign places, empathy and interaction with other people and tolerance (Salazar, 2006). It has some potential to act as a mechanism for promoting international peace by facilitating better intergovernmental relations (Kim, Prideaux, & Prideaux, 2007). For some academics, tourism is even considered to be one of the most important vehicles for promoting peace among the peoples of the world (Cho, 2007). Kim et al (2007) undertook research on tourism to North and South Korea and the their findings support the view that tourism can facilitate better intergovernmental relations. However, their research also highlights the fact that although tourism can contribute to peace, other conditions need to be in place beforehand – such as the creation of economic interdependence between countries. However the definition of peace

does not encompasses just its standard negative position of an absence of war and violence. It also embraces a positive position such as the influences of transparency, material and physical well being, culture, education and stewardship of the environment (Levy and Hawkins, 2009). Williamson (2012) contends that the way in which individuals interact and integrate can lead to institutional change. If we start from the principle that terrorism can be commodified as a tourist product (Korstanje & Clayton, 2012), we can investigate the nature of dark tourism and more specifically, the criteria that contributes to its emergence and development and then its contribution to society and among others its ability to deliver peace.

Dark tourism

Dorey (2016) provides in her literature review a sharp presentation of dark tourism. The aim here is to provide a condensed version of her analysis, with a focus on the origin of dark tourism, a new field of academic research (Price, 2005) and on the different types of dark tourism. The term 'dark tourism' was first coined by Lennon and Foley (1996) to define the relationship between dark tourism attractions and a specific interest in death, the macabre and the paranormal. Other academics such as Seaton (1996) have referred to this activity as 'thanatourism', 'morbid tourism' and 'blackspots' used to describe a fascination for travelling to places where death or tragedy has occurred. Dalton (2015) outlines how dark tourism sites are typically places of genocide and

mass murder, locations where terrorist acts have been executed or places where basic human rights have been violated. Although the visitation of sites associated with death and disaster have occurred over many years (Stone, 2006), it is only recently that this growing phenomenon has been academically identified. Uclan (2015, [Online]) describes how dark tourism has "…occurred ever since people have had the means and motivation to travel for leisure". Since the beginning of the 11th century, individuals were travelling to dark tourism destinations such as Jerusalem to visit the location of Christ's Crucifixion, a popular site for travelers visiting the Middle East. The fascination of death and psychological instabilities were also studied in great detail by the Victorians. For example, visits to St. Mary Bethlehem hospital were a common form of dark voyeurism, particularly amongst the wealthy middle class (Robinson *et al*, 2011). Other early dark tourism consisted of 19th century morgue tours in Europe, medieval executions and Roman gladiatorial games (Uclan, 2015 [Online]). Furthermore, it is important to consider the varying degrees and types of dark tourism. A central debate surrounding dark tourism relates to whether this phenomenon is supply or demand driven. Smith (2010) outlines a simple explanation of these terms. From a supply perspective, emphasis is placed on organisations and businesses that provide or deliver the service or experience. The opposite side, demand, focuses on the consumer seeking or participating in tourism activity. However, Stone and Sharply (2008)

describe how the nature of dark tourism, whether it is supply or demand driven, remains uncertain. Sharpley (2005) recognises that "based upon differing intensities of purpose with respect to both supply and demand, different 'shades' of dark tourism may be identified" (cited in Stone & Sharply, 2008, p.579). Sharpley (2005) describes how this is reliant on the extent of the consumer's fascination with death and the degree to which the site or destination is able to facilitate this, as to whether the attraction or experience can be labelled as either pale or dark (cited in Stone & Sharply, 2008, p.579). Following on and focusing more particularly on the concept of dark tourism, Daams (2007) describes how educational experiences are one of the key motives for attending these types of events. He outlines how visiting death and disaster sites can raise awareness of historical events and prompt the visitor to understand the world more clearly – ultimately creating an educational experience (cited in Niemelä, 2010, [Online], p.16). For example, Stone (2010) describes how dark tourism genocide sites such as Auschwitz allow visitors to learn of the history and envisage the conditions and torture individuals had to endure. Whilst an educational aspect is clear, Bowman and Pezzullo (2010) describe another major motivation related to the contemplation of death, as such sites such as Auschwitz, enabling people to come to terms with the fragility of life. Another motivation for visiting dark tourist attractions relates to an entertainment perspective. Stone (2010) explains why 'the London Dungeon'

provides a form of entertainment by describing how they use actors and entertainment values to exploit death and the deceased. Bowman and Pezzullo (2010) also describe how visits to dark tourism attractions can encourage a person to reflect on their own mortality. The motivations for dark tourism seem to be endless. However, there is an ethical issue related to dark tourism. Stone (2007) describes how travelling to destinations where people are known to have suffered or died can raise issues relating to exploitation for business, education or entertainment purposes. As a result, Garcia (2012) describes how the sensitive nature of dark tourism attractions poses many challenges to practitioners. In response to this, Rachel Noble, a representative of the charity Tourism Concern, suggests that sites associated with dark attributes should be avoided for numerous, ethical reasons. She describes how tourists visiting counties that have suffered in any way, whether this be through natural disaster or genocide, should contemplate the appropriateness of this (cited in Stokes, 2015 [Online]). However, other dark tourism attractions such as museums are considered to provide the experience and education in a more sophisticated manner (cited in Stokes, 2015 [Online]).

These perspectives prompt a question: Will France adopt an ethical attitude toward places (like Nice) that are now associated with death or is the commercial dimension going to take the upper hand? As Korstanje and Clayton (2012) note, the context, culture and history of the destination play an important

role in the future of these places of death. Taking the example of 9/11 in New York and the bombing in Buenos Aires in 1992, Korstanje and Clayton (2012), explain that US Ground Zero is now a sacred site, whereas in Buenos Aires, the site of the bombing is avoided and many people in Argentina remain silent about the topic. What will be the attitude of people and the Government in France?

Dark tourism in France

There is very little academic research on dark tourism in France. In fact, the only article of note is entitled: 'I will pay your graves...Opportunities, challenges and pitfalls of economic value creation thanks to the dark tourism' (Liarte, Delacour, Bornarel & Virgili, 2015). Though this paper is not specifically focused on dark tourism in France, it appears that this form of tourism is a rather insignificant part of the tourism industry. It appears that a few sites like *Pere Lachaise Cemetery; Oradour sur Glane 'ghost village';* or *Mohamed Merrah's house* in Toulouse are visited by tourists, but can't be considered as tourism sites *per se* as there is no organisation (facilities, equipments, etc) or economic activity build around them. For instance, there is no charge to visit the *Oradour sur Glane 'ghost village'.* In the same vein, when the Tour de France in 2014 passed the *Douaumont Ossuary,* everybody was quiet and sponsors suspended the giving away of their merchandising products to people following the tour. These examples show that dark tourism does not

happen systematically at every site where traumatic events have occurred - especially in France. If it is not possible to stop people from visiting these types of locations, Governments sometimes keep notorious locations (where people have been murdered or buried) secret to avoid the development of so called *'dark tourism'* (Hartmann, 2014). It seems therefore that ethical considerations are a barrier to the systematic development of dark tourism around some sites. As mentioned earlier, context, culture and history can also be barriers to the systematic development of dark tourism. France differs with England and the US in that France is not an 'extreme' Neoliberalist country (Prasard, 2005: 357). France is also, 'French' because of its culture, institutions and Neoliberalism (Prasard, 2005). These differences help to explain why dark tourism is not picking up in France as in other countries. Because France has state-led industrial growth (Prasard, 2005), our hypothesis in this paper, based on Hartmann's (2014) research is that the French Government would not allow the development of dark tourism around the church in Normandy where the priest was murdered; or along the English Promenade in Nice; in the Bataclan; Charlie Hebdo and elsewhere.

Recovery message

Tourism is especially vulnerable to exogenous factors like political instability, economic crisis, natural disasters and the outbreak of diseases (Ritchie, Dorrell, Miller & Miller, 2004). Those factors can cause destinations to decline and

sometimes even totally disappear from the tourism map (Seddighi, Nuttall & Theocharus, 2001). Subsequently, it is important for destinations to adopt strategies to mitigate their problematic status (Alvarez & Campo, 2014; Tarlow 2014). Because explicit and aggressive marketing strategies have proven to be ineffective for destinations suffering from legacy of political instability and disaster (Séraphin et al, 2016; Alvarez & Campo, 2014), Avraham (2015) argued that restoring the positive image of a destination relies on applying practical measures suitable to the context and situation of the destination. Walters and Mair (2012) observe that there is limited literature in this area of post-disaster destinations and emphasised the importance of further research in the field of post-disaster messages communicated via broadcast media, internet, social networking sites. In this paper we are arguing that a message combining elements of Dale and Robinson's (2001) model and the Anderson (2001) model can be used to persuade tourists to return to a location. We are referring to this model as the DRA model (DRA stands for Dale, Robinson and Anderson). Indeed, Dale and Robinson's (2001) 'three domains model of tourism education' argues that in order for a tourism education programme to meet the needs of the industry and stakeholders involved, it needs to: (a) develop interdisciplinary skills for a broad understanding of the industry; (b) provide expertise in a specific area in terms of skills and (c) explore niche markets. As for Anderson (2001, cited in Walters & Mair, 2012), he explains that the art of

convincing a target audience relies on three elements: (a) an 'ethos' element based on the credibility and trustworthiness of the source of the message; (b) a 'pathos' element is linked with the emotional appeal of the message and finally (c) a 'logos' element referring to the capacity of the message to inform. Future research could be about testing this theoretical model in order to provide evidence of its efficiency.

Conclusion

Because tourism contributes to the economic growth of a country (Brida & Risso, 2010), France as a destination will have to find solutions to maintain its leadership despite the terrorist attacks on its territory. In addition to the communication strategy that we discussed in the previous section, Santos, Vareiro, Remoaldo and Ribeiro (2016) suggest that cultural mega-events provide a way of enhancing a city's image. Based on the fact that terrorism is unlikely to disappear and more likely to evolve into a fluid form (Korstanje & Clayton, 2012), Santos et al's (2016) suggestion is unlikely to offer the best solution for France in the current environment. Mega events offer a good way to help France to show to the world what it has to offer but they can also turn the attendees into potential victims of terrorism. In this context, the question remains: What is the best possible marketing approach given that this strategy must contribute to enhance the image of the destination without jeopardising the life of its citizen?

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