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CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN TOURISM

Panoraia Poulaki

UNIVERSITY OF THE AEGEAN

Maria Lagou

UNIVERSITY OF WEST ATTICA

Anna Maria Pachou

UNIVERSITY OF THE AEGEAN

Abstract

In recent years, there has been a great deal of talk about crises and their management. A crisis is a serious and unforeseen event it can occur without any warning and is associated with situations characterized by a serious threat, uncertainty and a sense of urgency. This includes a threat to human and resources, the element of surprise, loss of control, and a short time to make a decision. The crisis is accompanied by escalating tension, an unforeseen situation, the public or international image endangered, causing damage. The crisis is characterized by the need for quick decisions and effective response. The impact can affect the products and services, an organization or stakeholder, even the financial situation of a country. In addition, it can even cost their viability. There is a feeling of insecurity and danger and all functions and rhythms are affected. There are many examples of the destruction of destinations or businesses in the tourism industry. Serious catastrophic changes have affected tourism in Greece as well. There have been crises in tourism related to terrorism, political instability, economic crisis and natural disasters. Crises in tourism are categorized as sudden and underwhelming. The crisis phases are as follows: Pre-crisis phase, situation phase, acute/peak phase, coping or impact phase, recovery or dissolution phase. It is very important to anticipate crises in order to prevent unpleasant consequences. Crisis management is a key demand of tourism businesses for a more efficient, faster and

better outcome. Crisis management will be a basic factor in tourism development and the major core of the development of societies. A coordinated effort is required of all involved, immediate decision-making and implementation of the action plan. Every government agency or tourism business must be prepared to plan and manage the threat/crisis with the right people. Key elements of crisis management are forecasting and strategic planning for a possible future crisis. It is necessary to have a sense of responsibility for tourism crisis management issues. High level of care, planning and know-how are needed to successfully deal with the crisis. At the same time, the design must be accompanied by competent and trained executives with approved funds for risk management. In the absence of proper planning, developments are rapid and reactions ineffective. This is the biggest threat to the tourism industry. Crisis management is directly related to marketing planning. Tourism companies are provided with an adequate plan to deal with crises. The planning and proper preparation lead to ensuring the least negative consequences that the crisis can cause. The purpose of this research is to highlight the importance of crisis management in Greece, as it is a vital tool and can protect the tourism stakeholder/organization, even the country if the process is properly implemented. Every business must have a crisis plan in place and be properly prepared. An integrated crisis management system with constantly well-trained staff is capable of dealing effectively and dynamically with accidents or disasters in tourism.

Keywords: Crisis Management; Tourism; Strategic Plan; Development

JEL Classification: L1, L50, L80, M19

Introduction

The tourism industry is characterized as particularly vulnerable to a wide range of events, both natural and human. A plethora of unpleasant events are affecting the planet in all its lengths and breadths, events whose the impact has literally changed the modern perception of travel, transportation and tourism in general.

A tourism crisis can take a huge variety of forms, something that has happened in the past but to a lesser extent than today. Natural disasters, such as floods, earthquakes, fires or volcanic eruptions, can do more damage to the image of a destination than to its own infrastructure, as one might think (Alexander, 2015). War conflicts, rising crime and epidemics can completely destroy the attractiveness of even the most established and recognizable tourism destinations, and even unexpected developments in currency rates can have a detrimental effect on a tourism crisis (Beirman, 2005).

Until now, the majority of companies and organizations that have adopted an organized approach believed that crises can be addressed through a simple operational adjustment and existing management. They focused on differentiate the decision making process and expected their return to the previous state (Boin, 2009). However, despite the fact that the above was the dominant example of crisis management, it does not cease to consider the potential crisis as a single event with a beginning and an end. Nowadays this position is being questioned. Recent events, such as the attack on the Twin Towers, the tsunami, Hurricane Katrina, bird disease, the Covid-19 pandemic, etc., cannot be considered as crises, whose the adverse effects are limited by dates of onset and expiry but as ingrained dangers lurking, emerging, appeasing, mutating, and always lurking (Sönmez, 1998; Chong, 2004).

The necessity of crisis management in tourism is the indisputable fact since it has become the main source of income for many countries and a large percentage of destinations rely solely on its economic growth and prosperity in the incoming tourism currency (Laws & Prideaux, 2005). Because of this, the need for organization in the face of any unpleasant developments increases and thus managers are under more pressure to develop strategies that will successfully protect the tourism business (Darling, 1994; Alexander, 2015).

This paper explores the theoretical and empirical background of modern crisis management in tourism and comparatively analyzes the strategies developed to address the consequences in the tourism industry.

2. Categorization of crises in tourism

Internationally, there are several ways to categorize crises in the tourism industry that can be considered to draw conclusions useful to draw up a crisis management plan that can reduce the negative effects (Foulkner, 1999). The main categories are the World Tourism Organization, PATA (Pacific Asia Travel Association) and the Queensland Tourism Organization of Australia, which are summarized as follows:

2.1 Separation of crises in tourism according to the WTO (World Tourism Organization)

The World Tourism Organization in 2003 proceeded to categorize the risks that could threaten the safety of tourists, places of reception and workers in the tourism sector, based on their source, as follows: Risks from: 1) The human factor and the social environment, 2) The tourism sector itself and the related industries, 3) The tourist himself, and 4) Natural and environmental risks.

In more detail:

- 1) The dangers posed by the human factor and the social environment arise when visitors fall victim to: a) Common criminal acts, such as theft, assault, robbery, fraud, etc. or specific acts of violence, such as rape, harassment, etc., b) Organized crime, such as extortion, the slave trade, or any form of coercion, (c) Terrorism, hijacking or hostage-taking, d) Wars, social strife, political and religious unrest, and e) Lack of public and institutional protection.
- 2) The risks due to cases of lack of organization of tourism and related industries, such as transport or retail. The safety of tourists may be threatened due to: a) Low levels of security in tourism facilities, for example fires, construction errors or lack of seismic protection, b) Lack of hygiene and ecological unconsciousness, c) Lack of protection mechanisms in tourism facilities against possible criminal acts, d) Fraud during commercial transactions, and e) Strikes of workers.
- 3) The dangers which the visitors-tourists themselves can endanger both their own safety and the places of their reception exist when: a) They engage in dangerous leisure activities, consume food and beverages of dubious quality or drive without observing the safety rules, b) They travel being ill and their health deteriorates during the trip, c) They provoke confrontations with the locals which visit or show inappropriate behavior by violating local customs and violating local laws, d) Engage in illegal activities, such as drug trafficking, e) Visit dangerous areas, and f) Lose travel documents or money through their own carelessness.
- 4) The risks due to a number of natural and environmental events, which lurk in the case that tourists: a) Are not aware of the natural characteristics of the destination and in particular the flora and fauna of the place, b) Have not taken the necessary medical measures when visiting areas with increased rates of disease, such as preventive vaccinations, c) Do not take the necessary precautions when eating or drinking or do not follow the rules of personal hygiene, d) Are exposed to dangerous situations related to the natural environment, such as natural disasters and epidemics.

2.2 Separation of tourism crises according to PATA (Pacific Asia Travel Association)

Another way to categorize the crises that tourism businesses and destinations may face is to break them down into man-made ones (e.g. terrorist attacks, plane crashes, political instability, hijackings, kidnappings, murders, hostage situations, uprisings, wars) and natural disasters (e.g. floods, epidemics, hurricanes, earthquakes, fires). This approach was adopted by PATA in 2003 and is proving particularly useful, as many of the natural phenomena, more and more often, follows a large scale of evolution and can therefore be transformed from a simple crisis to a catastrophe.

2.3 Crisis segregation in tourism according to the crisis management plan of the Queensland Tourism Organization of Australia.

The third proposed way of categorizing crises in the tourism industry is in direct and indirect with short-term, medium-term and long-term consequences for people, societies, wider regions and countries. This was the approach of the Queensland government in Australia, the first city to develop a tourism crisis management plan in response to the Bali bombings, the Iraq war and the SARS epidemic. This plan is widespread and the shocks it faces include natural disasters, terrorist attacks, war conflicts, public health issues and economic crises. The advantage of this approach is that it places more emphasis on indirect consequences as, at an early stage, they may become less perceptible.

3. Examples of tourist crisis management

The main crises and disasters that shook the world and the tourism industry are the following:

3.1 The attack on the US Twin Towers

The attacks of September 11, 2001 were the largest terrorist event which has occurred and are a milestone in world history, having brought about many changes in international relations, social and political life around the world. The death toll from the attacks was 2,977, with 24 people missing and more than 25,000 injured, with total material damage exceeding \$ 10 billion.

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 exposed the United States and showed the inability of its leaders to deal effectively with the coming crisis (Blake and Sinclair, 2003). The prioritization brought the normalization of the economy in the first place and the affected in the second. Knowing the great contribution of this sector to the GDP of America, this fact can only be considered as a wrong approach. On the contrary, the funds raised to deal with the effects of the terrorist attack were wasted, almost exclusively, on the aid of the airlines that reached the brink of bankruptcy.

The tragic omission of the US Tourism Authority for an organized promotional campaign was one of the reasons that the international tourism flow to them did not recover at the pace that some expected. Millions of dollars have been invested in enhancing the security of airports and cities. However, no funds were allocated for the obvious: the intensive promotion of the countless attractions that exist to remind the tourism public that it is worth overcoming any phobia, given the safety of flights, to visit a particular destination. This is evidenced by the vertical drop in rates of international arrivals. Although overnight stays increased along the way

this happened due to the rise of domestic tourism in the US after the Americans replaced the transatlantic vacation with travel within the territory.

3.2 SARS

The first official case of SARS occurred in Foshan, China on November 16, 2002. It is a serious and easily transmitted disease that appeared in the 21st century. For this disease, its ability to spread rapidly worldwide through international airlines is remarkable. Of course, the biggest concern of the international community was the transmission of the disease through the transport network of large urban centers, as well as its spread in densely populated areas. The World Health Organization (WHO) at the time considered any country with an international airport to be a potential target for transmitting the disease. About 8,100 cases of SARS, of which 916 are fatal, have been reported worldwide. However, despite this small number of cases, SARS has had a huge economic impact on the global tourism industry.

3.3 The Bali Bombing

On October 12, 2002, in Bali, a large bomb attack on a tourism center and two other bombings in central parts of the city killed 202 people. The blow to tourism was huge. As 88 of the victims were tourists from Australia, Bali's main tourism market, booking cancellations reached 40%, reducing occupancy from 75% to 33.4%. According to the Indonesian Ministry of Labor, 150,000 and 1,000,000 jobs were lost in Bali and Indonesia in general, respectively.

3.4 The tsunami of northeastern Sumatra

On December 26, 2004, a very strong earthquake shook the coast of Northeastern Sumatra. About 20 minutes later, a tsunami struck the Indian Ocean, thousands of miles from the epicenter of the quake, swallowing Thailand, Indonesia, the Maldives and Sri Lanka all the way to Africa. Entire cities disappeared from the map and thousands of people drowned in raging waves. Just three days after the disaster, the World Tourism Organization took action, and on December 29, 2004, Secretary-General Francesco Frangialli announced that an emergency meeting would be convened at the end of January to assess the impact and damage to each affected area. The rally took place in the "epicenter" of the disaster, in Phuket, southern Thailand. The "Emergency Task Force" was formed consisting of 29 members of the W.T.O Council, prominent tourism experts and technicians from all affected countries, as well as relevant organizations, such as PATA (Pacific Asia Travel Association). The chairman of the group was appointed by the Minister of Tourism of India, who coordinated the efforts to submit proposals that would be the "backbone" of a plan for the reconstruction of the place, a recovery plan. Thus was created the "Phuket Action Plan", this plan focused on marketing and communication, relief of victims, vocational training of employees in the

tourism industry and the redevelopment and repositioning of the tourism product with more emphasis on sustainability and crisis management (WTO, 2005).

3.5 The attack on the Sharm El-Sheikh resort in Egypt

In July 2005, a series of explosions hit Egypt's busiest tourism resort, Sharm El-Sheikh, killing many people and causing extensive damage to both hotels and tourism shops in the area (WTO, 2005a). At the time of the attack, there were thousands of tourists of various nationalities in Sharm El-Sheikh, mainly Italian, Arab, British, German and Dutch, but the number of foreign victims was not large.

The immediate reaction of the country's state apparatus resulted in the effective management of the crisis, with as little as possible implications for tourism as possible. After the attack, the initial reaction of some tourists was to return to their homelands. However, the majority of tourists preferred to stay. It is also noteworthy that no decrease in arrivals and reservations was observed after this period. In addition, no country has banned or recommended the avoidance of visits to Sharm El-Sheikh. The attack became part of the public consciousness as part of the overall global terrorist threat.

To deal with the crisis, many tourism companies in cooperation with the Egyptian government offered tourists who had already bought some packages the opportunity to change their travel dates for a few days later, when the aftermath of the attack would have subsided. In fact, they did not hesitate to direct them to other tourism resorts in the country.

3.6 Terrorist attack in London

The July 7, 2005 bombings in London (also known as the 7/7 bombings) were a series of coordinated suicide bombings targeting the public transport network in the British capital during rush hour. The attacks were carried out by four British Muslims, motivated by British involvement in the Iraq War. As a result, 56 people were killed, including 4 perpetrators, while another 700 people were injured and the London transport system was disrupted (largely on the first day) as well as the telecommunications infrastructure and the mobile phone system. The explosions are the largest and deadliest attack on the transport system in the history of the English capital.

The UK's tourism industry is one of the largest in the world with annual tourism revenues approaching £ 35 billion. Its share in the Gross National Product of the country reaches 4% while it provides 1.1 million jobs. Although no one would expect the July 2005 bombings in London (also known as the 7/7 bombings) to have dramatically burdened the British economy, the immediate and effective response to the crisis have minimized any losses.

Tourist arrivals decreased by only 588,000, i.e. by 1.9% of the total, which in turn led to a decrease in tourism revenues by 2.3%. Jobs offered in the sector decreased by 0.5%. The reduction of the effects of the bombing was advocated by the valid information of the citizens, the small number of victims, the arrest of the guilty in less than twenty-four hours, the new offers in the tourism packages, as well as the taking of targeted security measures throughout the city. No country has tried to prevent its citizens from visiting England while all international airports with flights to the United Kingdom have complied with the security conditions it has set.

3.7 The epidemics and the Covid-19 pandemic

Epidemics and pandemics are the invisible side of our history. Historians of epidemics and pandemics agree that they are linked to culture. Epidemics and pandemics do not belong to the emergency, but to normalcy, in the sense that on the one hand they are primordial and on the other they are recurring. There have been 39 epidemics in the last forty years. Before the turn of the last century, AIDS (HIV) caused millions of victims, especially in Africa. With the dawn of the 21st century, SARS appeared and almost every two years new epidemics followed, such as spongiform encephalitis, Ebola, bird disease, mad cows and hemorrhagic fevers. Smallpox in the 20th century killed 300 million, three times more than the two deadliest world wars. Recently we have the pandemic of Covid-19 disease that started in December 2019 in the city of Yunnan in China and has caused global upheaval in the economies of all countries and especially in the global tourism industry.

The travel sector which contributes to 10.4% of world GDP is directly responsible for creating 1 in 10 jobs worldwide and for eight consecutive years has exceeded the growth rates of the global economy.

According to the World Tourism Organization, (2020), due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of tourists worldwide is estimated to decrease from 1 to 3%, while until now it was projected to increase by 4%. This reduction implies a loss of \$ 30-50 billion from tourism spending.

The World Trade Organization predicts that the economic downturn and job losses due to the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus pandemic will be worse than the 2008 recession.

According to the World Tourism Council (WTTC, 2020), up to 75 million jobs are at immediate risk in the travel and tourism sector worldwide due to the coronavirus pandemic. This worrying percentage, based on a WTTC survey showing a loss of GDP from travel and tourism traffic in the international economy, amounts to \$ 2.1 trillion in 2020.

It is clear that the tourism sector is facing an economic collapse which will plunge millions of people who depend on it for their livelihood into recession. Not only this, it will have a huge negative impact on large companies in the tourism sector around the world, because the "domino" phenomenon will result in massive job losses throughout the supply chain, affecting employees and the self-employed. It is absolutely necessary to establish policies to support and maintain a sector that is a driving force of the global economy and responsible for creating one in five of all new jobs. This leads to the development of a strategic crisis management plan, in view of the new data of the global coronavirus pandemic.

4. Critical evaluation of the international practice for dealing with the tourism crises

Although the above segregation of crises presents a wide range of dangers that a tourist may be threatened during his trip, his physical safety has become the top priority after the events of 9/11. And while global problems such as warfare, natural disasters and epidemics have always rocked the world, the last 20 years have been a time of continual crisis that has not only had a devastating effect on millions of people, but has occurred in a very short time between them exhausting the physical endurance and the mental reserves of the victims as well as the financial viability of the companies and institutions involved.

The attack on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center and the deadly tsunami are two characteristic events that shook both ends of the planet. "Struck" two diametrically different civilizations, on the one hand, the United States of America, the world superpower, the mirror of modern imperialism that moves the threads and determines the fate of the world, Southeast Asia, on the other hand with countries whose inhabitants live below the poverty line, who are unable to meet their basic needs for survival.

In the case of the Twin Towers, the US moved without a plan and there was a "failure" of the US Tourism Authority due in large part to the complete absence of state involvement in the conduct of tourism policy. The complete privatization of tourism operators prevented coordinated efforts, with the exception of the tactics followed by the independent New York Tourism Organization, which saw its efforts rewarded and rates of city visits increase, as opposed to the rest of the country (Madininos & Vassiliadis, 2008).

In the case of the Southeast Asian tsunami, the "Phuket Action Plan" developed to deal with its consequences was successful and the result of a pan-Asian partnership with global reach (W.T.O., 2005). The Tourism Agencies of these countries are basically state-owned and the financial resources came from themselves, with the assistance of the W.T.O and other agencies from around the world.

The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has found the global community uncoordinated and without a strategic plan to deal with this extreme phenomenon (WTTC, 2020).

No matter how large or severe the crisis that shakes a tourism destination is its response must meet essentially two basic conditions: transparency and cooperation (Glaesser, 2003). If these prerequisites exist and are the guide for the crisis management plan, then success is the only logical way (Laws & Prideaux, 2005).

Whatever the strategy to be implemented, there is a set of basic requirements, i.e. some general guidelines that are essential components for a crisis management plan to be characterized as complete and effective (Glaesser, 2003). Specifically, a coordinated and team approach, Consultation and Commitment are required.

In addition, the process of planning a crisis or disaster in tourism should include: i) Risk assessment ii) Prioritization iii) Protocols iv) Community control v) Business center vi) Media and control mechanism vii) Advisory mechanisms vii) Flexibility ix) Participation, information and evaluation.

An organized crisis management plan should have as its ultimate goal the recovery of the travel public's confidence in the affected destination and the tourism industry in general, as well as the minimization of its impact on the region.

5. Proposed strategic approach to crisis management planning for tourism

Crisis management plans consist of all the necessary measures taken in all phases of the crisis life cycle, in order to minimize the negative effects. The guidelines are divided into three stages: before the crisis, during the crisis and after it (Glaesser, 2003; Marting & Bristor, 2003). In this context, the main factors to be taken into account by a crisis management team that systematically deals with this burning issue are proposed on a case-by-case basis.

FIRST PHASE: Pre-crisis procedures

Seizures are often likened to viruses, sudden, insidious, toxic, and extremely dangerous. The only way to deal with them in a timely manner is to prepare for the worst-case scenario.

A. Organization of communication strategy

- 1) General framework of the "crisis management plan"
- 2) Establishment of a communication team
- 3) Local media
- 4) Constant communication with foreign correspondents
- 5) Training of press representatives on security issues

B. Promotion Planning

- 1) Maintaining close contacts with tourism operators
- 2) Creating a database
- 3) Honesty and Ethics
- 4) Saving funds for emergencies
- 5) Access to emergency information

C. Evaluation of existing security

- 1) Cooperation with government departments responsible for security
- 2) Knowledge of the security measures taken
- 3) Training of local staff in security issues
- 4) Tourism Police

D. Research

- 1) Keeping crime statistics

SECOND PHASE: Procedures during the crisis

The preparatory process set out above will have an effect in the event of a crisis or catastrophe and then immediate action must be taken. The implementation of an organized and professional strategy is the main weapon in the hands of the crisis team to stimulate and restore the relationship of the place with the tourism industry. At this stage, the communication plan plays the first and last role after, of course, providing assistance to the victims, tourists or citizens.

A. Communication in the foreground

- 1) Immediate reaction
- 2) Honesty and transparency
- 3) Access to the Media to all information
- 4) Mentioning the victims
- 5) Accuracy and avoidance of unfounded assurances
- 6) Correction of false disclosures
- 7) The information that is published must be constantly monitored in order to be true

- 8) The language of numbers
- 9) Promoting positive prospects
- 10) Cooperation with tourism agencies in the countries of sending tourists

B. Promotion

- 1) Direct channels of communication with the partners of the tourism sector
- 2) Travel Instructions
- 3) Search for additional financial resources
- 4) Providing financial facilities to local tourism companies

C. Enhancing security

- 1) Telephone helpline
- 2) Internal communication

D. Research tactics

- 1) Branches of the national tourism organization abroad
- 2) Registration of visitors

THIRD PHASE: Procedures after the end of the crisis

The post-crisis process focuses on efforts to rebuild the affected area and the need to restore tourism confidence.

A. Communication strategy to improve the image of the destination

- 1) Evaluation of the collected information
- 2) Prudence in informing journalists
- 3) Promotion of promising messages and news
- 4) Intensification of journalistic fam trips
- 5) Anniversaries
- 6) Legal controversies

B. Flexible promotion

- 1) Tourists of special interest
- 2) Pricing policy
- 3) Approaching new markets or re-approaching old ones

4) The importance of domestic tourism

5) Fam trips for tour operators

6) Travel Instructions

C. Security for the future

1) Improving the quality of services and facilities provided

D. Effective use of research

1) Market and perceptions research

In any case, the above proposed management plan should be managed by a "Tourism Management Team" that will be framed by specialized executives in health-safety, terrorism, natural disasters, social unrest, legal, media, marketing and communications, but also representatives of the political leadership of tourism (Glaesser, 2003, Maditinos & Vassiliadis, 2011). In order for the action of the team to be effective, special emphasis should be given to the stage of preparation, which should at least include the creation of scenarios, the writing of specialized event management and the explicit distinction of all relevant stakeholders.

6. Conclusions - Policy proposals

In conclusion, no tourism destination is immune to impending crises and it is purely a matter of time before it is hit by one, of any kind, crisis or disaster. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary to formulate a strategy in various areas both during and after the crisis. The step that is often missed, because its importance is not properly assessed, is the preparation for the critical moment. In the strategic crisis management plan, the reconstruction process includes three distinct phases. The first concerns the preparation for any impending crisis, the second focuses on the measures to be taken during the crisis in order to mitigate its negative consequences, and the third, after the crisis has peaked, concerns the implementation of the reconstruction plan.

The strategy to be adopted must be aimed at achieving the best possible preparation in a similar situation in the future. Cooperation between agencies is the key factor in gathering the right information about the results of the crisis, promoting the desired messages and developing an effective recovery plan, which will definitely include a common strategy with the countries of sending tourists, so that the response to the crisis is coordinated and complete.

Special mention should also be made of the assistance of the World Tourism Organization, which is playing an increasingly important role in tackling various crises and disasters, especially those threatening global tourism, and providing

assistance to prevent or to weaken the negative impact. The management of the coronavirus pandemic situation is the latest example of the adequate and immediate response of the WHO and its ability to successfully deal with such demanding situations.

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