**Tourism Crisis Management: Emerging Aspects and Challenges**

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**Abstract**

The considerable susceptibility and vulnerability of the tourism and hospitality industry during crises and disasters, highlights the imperative importance of sufficient crisis management. Because each destination and enterprise has its own needs, capabilities and characteristics and whilst most tourism companies are family owned, the sectoral crisis and disaster management faces several challenges. As time passes by, crises and disasters increase exponentially due to the multiplication of numerous aspects, for instance due to climate change, the severe weather phenomena increase, whilst the depletion of natural resources multiplies social unrest and conflicts for their possession and exploitation. Therefore, a further focus on potential crises and disasters is more necessary than ever. This book chapter provides a holistic approach in tourism and hospitality risk and disaster management, and focuses on the managerial aspects the industry faces during crises and disasters. It also provides a brief analysis of the literature in terms of crisis categorizations, its tourism effects and risk management processes, further highlighting the research importance for tourism and hospitality industry concerning crises and disasters.

*Keywords*: crisis management; disaster management; recovery; tourism; hospitality

**Introduction**

Crisis management is an area characterized by high complexity, since it has to achieve the best understanding of the involved phenomena with its positive and negative effects (including scenarios, events and outcomes), the knowledge of the underlying processes and the appropriate root analysis of causes (Jensen & Aven, 2018). Crisis management concerns a set of several factors conceived, designed and developed in order to minimize the actual damage that can be caused by a crisis/disaster condition (Coombs, 2015). International crises are likely to increase as businesses create long supply chains and get involved in the process of expanding into new emerging and developed markets beyond their borders (Coombs & Laufer, 2018). The best practice of effective crisis management is for any organisation to prepare for a major crisis before it happens (Chang et al., 2018). Research in crisis management aspects identified that an organisation’s crisis management capabilities, rather than crisis management plans per se, have the most vital role for a major crisis’ preparation (Mitroff & Anagnos, 2001; Pappas, 2015). Resolution of a crisis is usually achieved when things go back to normal whilst negative impacts are the less possible (Vardarlıer, 2016).

The exponential increase in the number of crises and disasters affecting the tourism, and hospitality industry worldwide has highlighted the crucial role of resilience building (Prayag, 2018). There is extensive literature on crisis management in tourism and hospitality, especially case studies, that mainly focus on issues regarding causes, impacts, consequences and potential measures, which could be used as best practice to avert similar future situations (Lo et al., 2006; Pappas, 2018; 2019a; Pennington-Gray et al., 2011; Schroeder et al., 2014). However, there is still a need for a strategic approach to crisis management in tourism and hospitality, as there is scarcity of recommendations (Paraskevas & Quek, 2019).

This book chapter aims to provide a conceptual and more holistic understanding of crisis management in the tourism and hospitality industry. It focuses on the crisis management amalgam in the respective industry, explaining its formulation and operational role. It highlights the importance of current crisis management, as the exponential increase of crises, combined with the ever changing dynamics in emerging and developed markets, creates the necessity of adequate crisis management strategies and policies able to protect business in both, national and international level.

**The crisis amalgam**

There are numerous aspects that need to be considered in crises and disasters, before any kind of management implementation. Thus, the amalgam (nature, categorization, components etc.) of crises needs to be thoroughly evaluated before any disaster and/or crisis management is employed.

In general, crises and disasters are divided into two categories. The first category deals with reasons of crisis generation. This division entails natural (i.e. earthquakes, hurricanes, floods) and man-made (or technical) crises (i.e. terrorism, chemical accidents, oil leaks). The second category deals with issues related to whether a crisis is expected (i.e. recession) or unexpected (i.e. terrorist strike). Compared with manmade events, natural disasters have a much lower shock effect on people as they are more common. Hence, to some extent, people have developed psychological coping strategies, (acquisition of a fatalistic attitude), mainly by accepting the inevitable. Natural disasters have habitually been regarded as unavoidable, and largely beyond human control (Weisaeth et al., 2002). Evidently, unexpected crises have a higher shock effect than expected ones, since the latter provide time for psychological preparation. As a result, unexpected manmade crises and disasters have the highest psychological effect on people.

In terms of enterprising crises, they can also be categorized as internal or external (Table 1), depending on the type of the crisis (Mitroff et al., 1988). These dimensions arise from an application of a Jungian typology and are applicable to a wide range of organizational phenomena (Mitroff, 1983).

**Table 1:** Crisis classification matrix

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Internal | Technical / Economic | External |
| **CELL 1**Major industrial accidentsProduct injuriesComputer breakdownDefective, undisclosed information | **CELL 2**Widespread environmental destructionNatural disastersSocietal crisesLarge scale system failure |
| **CELL 3**Failure to adapt / changeSabotage by insidersOrganizational breakdownCommunication breakdownOn-site products tamperingIllegal activitiesOccupational health diseases | **CELL 4**Symbolic projectionSabotage by outsidersTerrorism, executive kidnappingOff-site product tamperingCounterfeiting |
| Human / Organizational / Social |

Adopted from: Mitroff et al. (1988)

According to Mitroff et al. (1988) Table 1 differentiates between those crises that are internal to an organization and the externally occurring events. The internal factors (cells 1 and 3) are usually looked at in a short-term basis, whilst the external factors (cells 2 and 4) are examined in a long-term basis. As Mitroff et al (1988) suggest this distinction is very important because crisis management cannot be the same for all of them.

As Baird (2010) suggests, there are four different key phases/stages of a disaster cycle: (i) preparedness (ii) response (iii) recovery and (iv) mitigation. Mitigation is considered as the initial phase of the disaster lifecycle and focuses on the ongoing effort to prevent and/or lessen the impact that disasters have on people and property (Brockie & Miller, 2017). Preparation refers to planning in advance, the way we must respond if a disaster or emergency occurs, including the development of the warning systems, the emergency response plans, and the appropriate education and training. Response refers to the phase when the disaster is detected and includes specific actions aiming to prevent further escalation and to save as many lives and properties as possible. Finally, recovery, the last phase of the lifecycle of a disaster, aims to return the affected society, inclusive of all its formal and informal systems, to normality as quickly as possible (Brockie & Miller, 2017).

There is also a need to clarify that crises differ from disastrous events. This is because disasters deal with a condition of severe loss of life and long-term damage to the society (Al-Dahash et al., 2019; Boin & McConnell, 2007; Hall, 2010; Park et al., 2019). Therefore, the scale and character of an event and the extent of vulnerability of a system prior to an event are fundamental issues that must remain at the forefront of any kind of crisis resilience or crisis management thinking (Prayag, 2018). It has to be pointed out that resilience is actually the pathway for communities on how to deal with disasters. According to Wisner and Kelman (2015) both ‘resilience’ and ‘community’ can have multiple definitions, whilst the artificial hazard categories from disasters refer to: (i) natural (or environment) hazards, (ii) technological hazards, (iii) violent social crisis (i.e.: terrorism; violent crime), and (iv) non-violent social crisis.

**Impact of crises in tourism**

The tourism and hospitality industry is usually a clear victim in crises (Faulkner, 2001; Pappas 2018) as it is considered to be highly vulnerable and susceptible (Vassilikopoulou et al., 2009). Thus, crisis management capabilities for both, companies and destinations should be of such quality that it can quickly resolve an evolving crisis and prevent it from spreading in the best possible way (Racherla & Hu, 2009). Although the level of impact of each crisis and disaster might not be the same, all crises and disasters have adverse effects on both tourism and hospitality’s demand and supply (Kiliclar et al., 2018). Thus, the absence of crises and disasters is a developmental tourism precondition, and something that is generally accepted (Araña & León, 2008). As Wilson and Anderson (2004) indicate, the ability of an organisation to successfully manage a crisis or a disastrous condition may lead to its survival or demise, and even to the life or death of its people. It needs to be highlighted that during crises, the competitiveness of an organisation depends highly on its flexibility and its ability to change and adapt to the new reality (Papanond, 2007), as tourism and hospitality organisations are facing increasing competitive pressures due to the rapid changes in the business environment (Gomes et al., 2007).

As Perles et al. (2016) suggest, tourism and hospitality literature includes studies that evaluate the impact of crises in three different directions. (i) evaluation of demand aspects (i.e. the used variable of interest is visitor arrivals); (ii) analysis of the reactions of the tourism and hospitality industry (i.e. reorientation of competitiveness; cost reduction); and (iii) the influential aspects of crises on tourism destinations (i.e. market share fluctuations; temporary competitiveness effects). These studies aim to provide a better comprehension of the attributional influence, which affects tourism and hospitality and their respective decision-making, with special reference to regions suffering from serious crises and disasters (Papatheodorou and Pappas, 2017). As Pappas (2018) indicates (Figure 1), one of the fundamental characteristics of crises is that they can generate multiple crises, or even combine with other parallel crises.

**Figure 1:** Effect of crises in tourism destinations



Source: Pappas (2018)

Since tourism is considered to be the third largest economic sector (after petroleum and automotive industries) in terms of direct earnings generation, and by far the largest economic sector if we also estimate the indirect earnings (Pappas & Bregoli, 2016), then economic crises heavily affect the tourism and hospitality industry. Perles et al. (2013) review of existing literature regarding economic crises in tourism and hospitality, divides studies into aspects of demand, evaluation of industry reactions, and the way crises impact on tourism destinations. As the literature suggests, in times of economic uncertainty, individual attitudes and perceptions are subject to numerous types of psychological and economic influences (e.g. Sarmento et al., 2019). Thus, a bleak economic environment could have a substantial influence on the perceptions of residents concerning the impacts of tourism and their willingness to support it (Garau-Vadell et al., 2018). Hence, delineating the role of the economic context becomes a very important research question in times of turbulence, and practically it can provide useful information for longer-term strategic planning in tourist destinations (Sharpley, 2014).

However, numerous instability related effects can be generated from a certain crisis, or even through different types and/or combinations of crises. As presented in Table 2, the literature has already identified several different effects generated by crises and disasters. These effects need to be examined and understood in order to be able to effectively cope with the crisis itself (Pappas, 2018). The usual misunderstanding is that sometimes we consider a crisis as unique, something that is dangerous but contained as a sole entity. In reality, a crisis (or a major disaster) can generate a series of other crises (or disasters). For example, in 2011 a major earthquake hit Japan (1st disastrous event), and then created a tsunami (2nd disastrous event) that hit the eastern coastal area of the country (Oskin, 2017). The combination of those two events led to the meltdown (3rd disastrous event) of Fukushima nuclear plant. Even if Japan had quickly recovered from the consequences of the first two disastrous events, it would still struggle to cope with the nuclear meltdown.

**Table 2:** Instability effects generated by crises

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Effects** | **Indicative Previous Studies** |
| Business efficiency | Pearce II and Michael (2006); Olthetena, Sougiannis, Travlos and Zarkos (2013) |
| Productivity aspects | Mar-Molinero, Menéndez-Plans and Orgaz-Guerrero (2017); Yépez (2017) |
| Operational ability | Akrivos, Reklitis and Theodoroyiani (2014); Epstein, Shapiro and Gómez (2017) |
| Competiveness | Cirstea (2014); Pappas (2015a) |
| Innovation output | García-Pozo, Sanchez-Ollero, and Ons-Cappa (2016) Naidoo (2010) |
| Enterprising cooperation | Okumus and Karamustafa (2005); Voltes-Dorta, Rodríguez-Deniz and Suau-Sanchez (2017) |

The same applies with crises. For example, in Greece, the 2008 economic crisis generated further political and social crises that had an extensive impact on tourism, as international arrivals were reduced by 5.5 percent in 2012 as compared to 2011. This in effect had negatively affected accommodation providers (Merkenhof, 2014). This was a consequence of the economic crisis mismanagement by the Greek government, combined with the implementation of extreme austerity measures, and the unrealistic demands and assumptions of Greece’s creditors for handling public deficit (Elliot, 2016). As a result, during 2015 those policies led to social unrest and riots, marked political instability (resulting in two national elections and a referendum), and capital controls in Greek banks, also bringing the country to the verge of an exit from the European Monetary Union (EMU) (Pappas, 2018).

**Crisis management in tourism**

The enhancement of strategic management in order to reduce risk and boost the readiness of an organisation when negative events occur, means that the combination of tourism-specific insights from other disciplines needs to be employed (Ritchie, 2008; Liu et al., 2019). Crisis management is a technique aimed at the avoidance of emergencies, as well as a method to deal with them, thus mitigating disastrous consequences (Jia et al., 2012). Tourism and hospitality are particularly vulnerable to external effects. These incidents are predominantly unexpected and need to be handled through effective and efficient processes of risk and crisis management (Cro & Martins, 2017). It is common knowledge that crises formulate dynamic and uncontrollable conditions that can only be deciphered by people who have previous experience of such events. Hence, the major crisis management challenge is to quickly find experts with the experience and/or knowledge needed to manage the particular crisis conditions (Jia et al., 2012). This is something particularly difficult in the tourism and hospitality industry since the vast majority of companies are family-owned Small and Medium Enterprises (SME’s).

Risk management needs to be integrated in a way that considers the specific needs of destinations and organisations. As a result, the systems of Integrated Risk Management (IRM) are employed in numerous different ways, and they may significantly differ among organizations (Bromiley, et al., 2014). Thus, a series of semi-regulatory bodies have released specific frameworks aiming to assist organizations in implementing and designing their own IRMs (Miculic et al., 2018).

In general terms, the key value of an integrated approach to risk and crisis management (Figure 2) is that it enables decision-makers to better comprehend the ‘big picture’ of a specific destination’s potential disastrous event associated risks and be able to evaluate more effectively the correlations between specific risk types (Miculic et al., 2018). As Figure 2 showcases, an ‘integrated risk management process’ entails a series of stages aiming to achieve a holistic understanding of a potential crisis/disaster, while at the same time providing specific plans and guidelines in order to properly handle the generated effects.

**Figure 2:** Integrated risk management process



Source: Miculic et al. (2018)

In tourism and hospitality research, there are four clearly defined streams in the area of crisis management (Paraskevas & Altinay, 2013). The first research stream refers to the effects of crises upon tourism (i.e. Mihalic, 1999; Pizam & Smith, 2000). Research in crisis and disaster impacts on tourism and hospitality mainly examines natural disasters, terrorist activities, and pandemic disease (Jin et al., 2019). It evaluates factors of diminishing tourism activity (Eugenio-martin et al., 2005); it examines management challenges faced when crises and disasters affect the tourism economy, as well as the strategies adopted and measures taken for a speedy recovery (i.e. Wijaya & Furqan, 2018).

However, studies regarding impacts of crises and disasters are limited as it is difficult to single out the effects of a series of crises if they occur consecutively (Song & Li, 2008). The existing literature mostly examines the impact degree and time lag for single events (i.e. 9/11 terrorist strikes). As a result, there is a lack of studies that include a long-term impact comparison, as well as cross-impact analysis of different types of crisis events in tourism and hospitality (Jin et al., 2019).

The second research stream focuses on the recovery aspect of crisis management by rebuilding the image of the destination through adequate crisis communications and marketing initiatives (i.e. Fall & Massey, 2006; Pappas, 2019b). The destination image restoration includes several models and frameworks, and is associated with a long tradition in apologia and genre studies, recovery marketing, reputation management, rhetoric theory, and crisis public relations (Benoit, 1995). As Brinson and Benoit (1999, p. 486) suggest, “… image restoration rhetoric attempts to redress allegations or suspicions of wrongdoing”, so throughout time, studies have predominantly used the term “image repair” instead of “image restoration” (Benoit, 2000). These image repair strategies are used by organisations, destinations and interest groups, solely or combined, aiming to repair their image after various kinds of disastrous events (Avraham, 2015).

Further and even though, as Nielsen (2001) highlights, it is still challenging to promote effectively destinations and organisations that suffer from negative image. The provision of effective messages and accurate information aimed at specific stakeholders may lead to public reassurances, reduced consequences, and positive organisational imaging during or following a crisis outbreak (Coombs, 2014).

Crisis management communication is a fundamental aspect of crisis management. It is at the heart of strategic crisis management policies and practices for the tourism and hospitality industry (Ritchie, 2008; Pappas, 2019b). By definition, the messages of crisis communication include both news articles reporting crisis events and crisis responses by the organizations and destinations involved. However, as these messages are designed and broadcasted by different entities, they tend to shift the focus of attention (Liu et al., 2016). Additionally, the corresponding media announcing information is likely to make the crisis situation even more complex and amplify the perceived risk of the audience (Kasperson et al., 2003).

The third research stream refers to the importance of a pre-crisis stage and suggests that both tourist destination and tourism and hospitality organisations have to understand the causes and consequences of previous crises in order to sufficiently plan and adequately prepare themselves for the future (i.e. Cushnahan, 2004; Woods, 2005). Pre-crisis stage is important to be understood in order to better comprehend the way we can handle crisis and disaster situations. This process incudes defining crises and disasters, explaining the nature of crises and disasters, as well as their anatomy and lifecycle, and finally highlighting the complexity and chaotic nature of events, which pose challenges in managing or preventing disasters or crises in both, emerging and developed markets (Ritchie, 2004). In this stream, previous crisis management studies focused on developing models and/or frameworks depicting ways to deal with various crisis stages, aiming to provide a better understanding of crisis that could lead to a more proactive and strategic management approach (i.e. Santamaria & Filis, 2019). Occasionally, these models and frameworks have been used and acted as guidance to actual crisis situations. As Ritchie (2004, p.671) suggests “… by understanding these phenomena more effective strategies can be developed to stop or reduce the severity of their impacts on business and society, despite their complexity”.

Finally, the fourth and last research stream integrates the extant knowledge of disaster management and generic crisis, and suggests succinct strategies, models and frameworks for a ‘holistic’ crisis/disaster management in hospitality and tourism (i.e. Glaesser, 2003; Pappas, 2018; Ritchie, 2004). The provision of specific strategies and practices for handling a crisis or disaster is of paramount importance for the tourism and hospitality industry, because as it develops and matures, similarly does its need for strategic management and planning to handle potential risks and disasters (Mikulic et al., 2018). Case studies that examine tourism and hospitality industry during and immediately after a disastrous event provide vital information that can assist tourism planning and development for, and recovery from, disasters (Jiang & Ritchie, 2017; Novelli et al., 2018). The study of a tourism destination’s response to a major disaster, its long term effects, and its experience of recovery can lead to developing guidelines (Hystad & Keller, 2008) needed for destination and organisational planning and development and for a long-term recovery (Ritchie, 2004).

It is important to highlight that most studies, however, focus on enabling communities, governments and large corporations to respond to such events (Robinson et al., 2019). Whereas, it has to be considered that the majority of businesses in the industry are SMEs and hence have a greater need than the one given to the recovery of small tourism businesses caught up in a regional calamity (Pappas 2015; 2018).

**Conclusion**

Although the importance of crisis management in tourism and hospitality is exponentially increasing due to crises and disasters becoming more and more frequent, the difficulty is in the implementation of the formulated models and frameworks. This is because most, if not all of them are structured during non-crisis/disaster periods, thus their efficiency cannot be fully encapsulated. Our experience comes from past events; however, and every crisis differs from one destination and/or organization to another. This means that apart from generic models and frameworks, each organization should tailor its own emergency and recovery strategies depending on its individual and unique characteristics.

Another aspect that needs to be considered is the external environment of each and every tourist and hospitality organization. The operational mode is most likely to differ if this enterprise operates in an emerging or a developed market. This is because, emerging markets are more susceptible to crises and disasters, since they haven’t fully developed mechanisms able to adequately handle specific crises.

Risk and crisis management is an important tool to all organizations and destinations. However, further research is needed regarding the various aspects of crisis and disaster management. As our world becomes more and more complex and chaotic, the examination of risks, disasters and crisis also needs to further progress to the evaluation of the complex systems that consist it. New pioneering methodologies such as fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA), conjoint analysis, and Necessary Condition Analysis (NCA) are imperative for the examination of the crisis management and recovery in tourism and hospitality. Therefore, tourism research not only needs to further examine in-depth the aspects of crises and disasters, but also to further evolve using more advanced methodologies able to holistically evaluate such phenomena.

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