

Analyzing the Effect of Socio-Political Context on Tourism: Perceptions of Young Tourists in Greece, Portugal and Israel

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Abstract : International crises that affect tourism, such as terror attacks, political unrest, and economic crises have become more frequent, and their influence has become broader. The influence of such extreme events depends on their salience in the tourists' awareness. Hence, it is important to understand the mechanisms underlying tourists' selection of travel destinations, especially their perceptions of crisis-related events and the impact of the sociopolitical and economic context in their countries of origin. The current study examined how the socio-political and economic context in the home countries of potential young tourists affected their selection of travel destinations. The objective was to elucidate how the salience of various crises (economic and political) in the tourists' perceptions, due to their experiences at home, color their construal of destinations affected by similar hazards and influence their travel intentions. The study focused on student tourists from Israel, Greece, and Portugal. Today about a fifth of international tourism is based on young people, especially students. These countries were chosen since Greece and Portugal are in the midst of economic crises. In addition, Greece and Portugal have experienced political instability, while Israel has security-related problems (including terrorist incidents). In 2013, a total of 648 students, responded to a questionnaire that included questions concerning attitudes and risk perceptions regarding travel to destinations with various risk hazards as well as socio-demographic details. The results indicate that over half of the Israelis intend to visit Greece or Portugal. The majority of the Portuguese intend to visit Greece, while less than a third of them intend to visit Israel. About half of the Greeks intend to visit Portugal, and most of them do not intend to visit Israel. The results indicate that greater perceived importance of economic crises mitigates the intention to travel to destinations with economic crises for tourists from origin countries that are also marked by economic crises, such as Greece and Portugal. However, for tourists from Israel, a country with a relatively stable economy, issues related to the economy barely affect their intention to travel to the other two countries. The findings also suggest that Greeks and Portuguese who are highly concerned about political unrest are unlikely to select Israel as a tourist destination. In addition, strong apprehension regarding terrorism impedes the intention to travel to destinations marked by terrorist incidents, such as Israel. The current research contributes to the existing literature by highlighting the impact of travelers' personal previous experience with crisis on their risk perceptions and in turn on their intentions to travel to countries with similar risks. Therefore, in a world where such incidents are on the rise, understanding tourists' risk perceptions and behavior and the factors influencing their destination-related decisions are crucial for countries that wish to increase the numbers of incoming tourists.

Keywords : economic crises, political instability, risk perception, young tourists

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