

Impacts of terrorism on sporting events



Examining the Impacts of Terrorism on Sporting Events: Focusing on the FIFA World Cup.

Terrorism is now, more than ever, a prevalent subject within media discourse. The impact of threats of terrorism, be they perceived or realised, is one that should not be underestimated. While the threat of terror attacks is one that we see on a regular basis, the fact that large scale events such as the FIFA World Cup draw thousands of spectators to one confined area (i. e. a football stadium, and the location surrounding the stadium) means that terror attacks and the threat thereof should be addressed as part of the risk assessment for the event.

The events industry, focusing particularly on sports tourism, have been affected by the global concerns surrounding terrorism. Hinch and Higham (2001) recognise that sport in general, be that on a local or a global level, has a huge influence on the numbers of tourists that are attracted to a particular area. Sport is a massive, multi-billion-pound industry, and the tourism that it encompasses makes a significant contribution to the revenue it creates.

There are a number of facets to sport tourism that make it what it is. There are three prominent markers of this particular aspect of tourism, which include outdoor sports, fitness activities, and major events (Hall, 1992). If we consider one of those criteria - major events - then this study will focus on the FIFA World Cup, and will explore how the World Cup has been affected by terrorism.

Since the 2001 terror attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Centre, major events have been directly affected by the threat of terror attacks. Sports tourists no longer feel as safe as they did travelling to destinations for major sporting events, as the risk of attack is perceived as being much greater. These fears are exacerbated by the fact that tourists are in enclosed spaces for the duration of the sporting event, with means of escape being difficult to navigate and police in large crowds.

Since the late 1900's sports tourism has seen a surge in popularity unrivalled by other large scale events (Standeven and DeKnopp, 1999). Sport tourists are known to spend a significant amount of their income on travelling to destinations in order to watch their favourite team or sportsperson perform. We can define sport tourism as "sport-based travel away from the home environment for a limited time, where sport is characterised by unique rule sets, competition related to physical prowess, and a playful nature" (Hinch and Higham, 2001, p. 56). This can be directly attributed to the FIFA World Cup, as teams of players will take part in a match with defined rules, are athletic by their very nature, and if we break football down to a basic level, the players are playing a game.

So, as discussed one of the criteria that makes up sports tourism is 'major events'. This title can be attributed to the likes of the FIFA World Cup and the Olympics. We can see how the act of putting on such a large-scale event has benefits for both the fans of the particular sport in question (in this instance the FIFA World Cup) and also the country in which the event is to be based. The fans are afforded the opportunity to witness their favourite sports team in action, while the revenue produced through their tourism contributes

greatly to the area in which the event is to take place. During the FIFA World Cup that took place in South Korea in 2002, the then-president of South Korea is quoted as stating that the event was 'a chance for us to make the country prosper diplomatically, economically and culturally, in sectors like tourism and science' (McCormack, 2002, p. 39), 'us' in this instance being South Korea.

As there is a significant return made when compared to the actual investment involved in the planning, launching, and running of such an event, many destinations who are able to host events such as the FIFA World Cup vie for the opportunity to do so, as they are all too aware of the benefits they will be rewarded with in exchange for their investment (Kelly, 2000).

Although we have seen significant growth in terms of sports-related tourism (which may be due to the advancement of travel networks, and the ability to now travel to events for a smaller financial outlay), the notion of sports tourism is still a fairly new construct. With this in mind, consideration by organisers must be made towards how terrorism can have negative effects on sports tourism. Sport is a global phenomenon, which means that global incidents, such as acts of terrorism, have a direct effect on the industry.

Terrorism is a difficult term to describe. In fact, the US Department of State (2001) has argued that there is no universally accepted definition of what terrorism actually *is*. There are a significant number of variables that can affect how people perceive an act of terrorism, and indeed whether they actually see an act as one of terrorism at all. Ganor (2001) argues that in order for terrorism to be fought back against, then a specific definition should

be in place that sets out exactly what an act of aggression (or otherwise) should constitute in order for it to be labelled as 'terrorism'. This inability to agree on what constitutes terrorism has led to several difficulties.

Governments are unable to create laws around terrorism because they can't agree on what terrorism is (Whitaker, 2001), and also opposing terrorism, in certain circumstances, could be construed as an act of terrorism in of itself.

Freedman (2002) attempts to remedy the situation of disagreement regarding what is and isn't terrorism by stating what those attempting to define it *do* agree on. These factors include:

- Terrorism is carried out in a purposeful manner (i. e. specific targeting).
- Terrorism is inclusive of acts of violence, which vary in their extremity.
- Terrorism has some form of political motivation.
- Victims of terror are not 'pre-selected' (i. e. victims of suicide bombers for example)
- The act of terror is intended to affect people, bodies or movements outside of the direct victims of the attack (i. e. coercion of a government to act in a certain way as a result of the attack).

Most of the discourse surrounding violence within the sporting industry has been directed towards the violent conduct of spectators of a specific sport. Football fans in particular have found themselves the subject of much conjecture regarding the causes of sports violence, and this has been the case since the 1960s and 70s.

There has, however, been an underwhelming degree of investigation into the effect of terrorism on sports tourism (Atkinson et al, 2000, p. 54).

Wedermeyer (1999, p. 218) supports this assertion in stating that 'specialist literature on the relationship between sport and terrorism is rare'. This is in contradiction to the fact that major sporting events are in no way insusceptible to terrorist attacks, a point which is highlighted by the fact that in December 2016, a series of car bombs was detonated outside the stadium of Turkish football team, Besiktas, injuring many in the process, the majority of whom were completely innocent civilians.

Atkinson and Young (2000, p. 54) further their point by saying that although, on the face of it, sports may not seem to be linked to acts perpetrated by terrorist organisations, there is no escaping the fact that major events in the sporting world may become the target for terrorist attack. These acts of terrorism may not only be directed towards the spectators at a major sporting event, but also those who partake in the events themselves (i. e. the athletes), or even the large corporations who have put funds towards sponsorship of the event. They are, in essence, saying that everyone associated with the event is a potential target for terrorism. If we consider the FIFA World Cup, then this is quite obvious a major event, with a huge amount of prestige attached to it. As a result, it makes sense that we can consider the FIFA World Cup, in the contemporary climate in particular, to be at risk of a terrorist attack.

We have seen historical instances of major sporting events attracting the attention of terrorist groups. Perhaps one that will be forever remembered is the 1972 Olympic Games, which took place in Munich. A militant terrorist organisation known as 'Black September' stormed the grounds of the Olympic residents accommodation and attacked the Israeli team's hospitality

area. In doing so, they murdered one Israeli sports coach in cold blood, and took ten hostages. The attempts to save the hostages failed tremendously, and they all died as a result of the failed attempt, as did a number of the Palestinian terrorists involved in the coup, and several police officials.

More recently, during the Olympic games which took place in Atlanta in 1996, several individuals died either as a direct result, or indirect result, of a concealed bomb which was hidden in a backpack in the spectator area of the stadium. Many were injured in the attack, while one of the spectators died as a result of the blast.

We have seen how World Cup Football has contributed to violence in the past, and sometimes on a serious and larger scale than 'mere' hooliganism. In 1969, two countries, Honduras and El Salvador, ended up declaring war on one another after they came head-to-head in a pre-tournament qualifying match. Because friction between the two countries was already high, this translated directly to the football field, and as a result the spectators clashed violently with each other. This escalated and the two countries entered into a war in July of that year.

Whilst this may not be seen as a direct act of terrorism, it does serve to illustrate how violence is present in World Cup football, or any kind of football for that matter. However, this kind of violence can be seen as politically motivated. Two separate sets of fans are brought together, from separate countries, between which tensions may be running high. The emotion of the event, and the patriotism felt for each set of fans' own countries, by the fans themselves, could potentially lead to an act of terrorism taking place.

As mentioned earlier, sport is a truly global phenomenon. So, it goes without saying that globalisation will have an effect on sports related-violence. We have seen how global travel has become much more accessible to those who previously were unable to make journeys to far-away destinations due to the financial implications of doing so. However, we briefly touched upon how football hooliganism has been an issue in sports events since the 70s. Inexpensive holiday deals, and even travel deals tailored specifically towards the sports tourist, have been prolific for the past 30 years, and so it makes sense to make the link between sports tourism and sports violence.

Working class males have been given access to the deals mentioned above, which means that they can travel to destinations for a comparatively nominal fee. It shouldn't be viewed as entirely coincidental that where these travel opportunities are made available, and are combined with cheap alcohol, that sports violence (particularly hooliganism, which is often associated with working class males) would increase and become more of a threat in the time leading up to a major sporting event. Taylor (2002, p. 27) supports this assertion. He states that 'For many (especially) 'working class' young men, it was football that first initiated them into 'foreign' travel'.

To return to World Cup Football and acts of terrorism, we saw that there was a great deal of concern surrounding the safety of spectators and participants of the 2002 South Korean FIFA World Cup. As stated earlier, this was as a direct result of the atrocities that took place during the 9/11 terror attacks in America. Nevertheless, all the authorities involved decided that this major event should go ahead unhindered. This may well have simply been down to the fact that the revenue generated by the tournament would have been

undeniably beneficial to South Korea. Indeed, as quoted earlier, the South Korean President, Kim Dae-Jung, stated himself exactly how beneficial it would be for their country, bringing in hundreds of thousands of tourists from across the globe.

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