

Tourism stakeholders' involvement and collaboration in the context of the Ukraine refugee crisis

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Objectives | The fact that wars are still a rather widespread reality in the 21st century, with significant negative effects for the involved territories (Tomej et al., 2023), holds significant interest in the field of tourism. On the one hand, the tourism industry can be severely affected in war contexts, as wars determine such conditions which make it difficult for the tourism sector to survive (Fyall et al., 2006). On the other hand, it is considered that the tourism industry, due to the resources it has, could have (and should have) an important role in supporting the regions impacted by wars, and questions have been raised regarding the actions that could be taken in this direction (Dolnicar & McCabe, 2022). These concerns have been amplified recently especially because of the political context following the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, a context considered very damaging for the world tourism economy (Kumar Pandey & Kumar, 2022), but which also brought to attention the matter of "solidarity tourism" (Dolnicar & McCabe, 2022; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2022).

In light of the above-mentioned facts, the current paper approaches the second perspective regarding the relationship between wars and tourism, respectively the one concerned with the potential of tourism industry of supporting war-affected territories and individuals. More precisely, only a particular topic related to war crises will be approached, that of the support and assistance offered to the refugees who fled to escape the wars. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to explore the role and the potential impact of tourism stakeholders in the management of war-related crises, with focus on the particular case of the refugee crisis determined by the war in Ukraine in 2022. With this aim in mind, a series of research questions have been formulated: (1) How can the tourism industry, in general, and different types of stakeholders, in particular, contribute to managing a crisis induced by a war? (2) What role does collaboration between tourism stakeholders play in the context of such a crisis? (3) What action procedures could be established to ensure efficient interventions on behalf of tourism industry for future crisis situations?

Methodology | The study relied on a semi-structured interview applied to a number of 11 stakeholders involved directly or indirectly in the tourism activity in Iasi City, Romania, belonging to

various sub-fields of the tourism sector (hospitality, transport, administration). They were selected based on their involvement in supporting refugees from Ukraine, as reflected in the local media and newspapers, their support varying based on the specific of their activity. Iasi City was chosen as case study due to its key involvement during the Ukrainian refugee crisis in 2022 and because the tourism industry in this city was considerably impacted in the first stages of this crisis. Also, Iasi City stands out through its important administrative and economic role in the region. The interview was structured in three main sections, concerning the following topics: (1) detailed insights on tourism stakeholders' involvement in supporting the refugees, (2) the role of tourism stakeholders collaboration in managing this war-induced crisis and (3) stakeholders' suggestions for a better management of such crises. Data obtained through these interviews were analysed through thematic content analysis and Social Network Analysis.

Main Results and Contributions | The help provided by the stakeholders was diverse, from accommodation, daily meals, essential products, or transportation, depending on the field of activity of each individual stakeholder. The first two months following the outbreak of the war coincide with the most substantial support from the tourism stakeholders, and some of the stakeholders continued to be partly involved throughout the year. As for their motivation, the emotional impact that this crisis had on them, as well as the desire of some of the stakeholders to define Iasi as "the destination of solidarity", although this was not really transformed in a marketing strategy in the end, stand among the main drivers of their involvement.

Opinions regarding the importance of collaboration for supporting the refugees varied, and these opinions are also reflected in the intensity of collaboration, as stakeholders who indicated to have been dependent on collaboration also pointed out numerous and diverse relationships established for providing support to the refugees. Two stakeholders stand out as having a central role in the network of stakeholders, respectively the Iasi International Airport and the Destination Management Organization called „Destination Iasi” a role emphasised by their high level of connectedness in the collaboration network. Therefore, such stakeholders prove to have a significant influence in bringing other stakeholders together in such a crisis situation, and their actions might further provide an example in defining proper solutions from a crisis management perspective in times of war.

Limitations | Considering the employed methods, an important limitation of the study resides in the sometimes-reduced availability of tourism stakeholders for the interview. As such, a higher number of respondents could have provided even further insights into tourism sector's involvement in the Ukraine crisis and also other important networking behaviours could have been identified. Further research may reveal comparisons between cross-border tourist destinations with reference

to their role in supporting Ukraine refugees, for a more in-depth view on the matter, as well as for theoretical advancements in this field of research.

Conclusions | Managing the refugee crisis induced by the war in Ukraine was definitely a joint effort, and the tourism sector had undeniably an important role, as it was presented unanimously by the interviewees. The current study shed light on the potential that tourism stakeholders have in supporting the refugees following the outbreak of a war, and the insights provided through this analysis bring to attention a matter of utmost importance, that needs to be further approached: there is an evident necessity for developing solidarity tourism action procedures for potential future war-induced crises in order to ensure an optimal involvement of tourism stakeholders during such crises.

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