

The Effects of the 2012 Socio-political Crisis in Mali and its Impact on Tourism in Dogon Country: The Social and Communication Adaptations how does Political Crisis affect Tourism?

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Abstract—In this article, we shed light on the attractions and tourist potential of Mali in general and the Dogon country in particular. The Dogon Country is a part of Mali that has become the country's leading tourist destination thanks to its authentic culture and unique architecture.

Since 2012 Mali has been experiencing a deep crisis in the north. Tourism has experienced a sharp decline this year, confirmed by the number of arrivals by air, which decreased from 129,975 in 2011 to 101,335 visitors-- a drop of 22%. Between 2011 and 2012, visitor attendance at accommodation establishments dropped from 194,868 to 46 859. The number of jobs created decreased from 1,119 (in 2011) to 788 (in 2012), a decrease of 30%. Investments decreased from twelve billion CFA francs in 2011 to less than six billion in 2012.

Better communication is needed by the official tourism authorities. In light of the crisis that has gripped the country since 2012; we analyze the impact and effects of the crisis on tourism.

Keywords: Mali - Dogon Country - culture- tourism-war.

1. BRIEF PRESENTATION OF MALI AND THE DOGON COUNTRY



Fig. 1: World Political Map

A landlocked country, Mali is located in West Africa and shares 7000 kilometers-worth of borders with seven nations. It covers an area of 1,242,238 km². It has 17,963,218 inhabitants with a density of 14.46 inhabitants per square meter (populationdata.net). Mali is a poor country and ranks 177th out of 188 countries on the Human Development Index (HDI 2013). The illiteracy rate is 61%.

As for the Dogon country, it is located southwest of the Niger loop in the fifth administrative region of Mali with about 900,000 inhabitants on an area of 400,000 hectares, including 289 villages. The surface area classed by UNESCO (nature and culture) is 4000 km².



Fig. 2: Dogon country in Mali

Mali is a country of great civilization and culture. She was, successively, the cradle of the medieval empires of Ghana, Mali, Songhay, of the kingdoms of Bambara, of Segou and

Kaarta, and of the theocratic states Peul and Toucouleur (HITT, 2010). At its peak, when it was still an empire Mali amazed the world with its gold wealth. Mali's history made her a crossroads between the dry northern Sahara and the humid south. Its cultural diversity and history have made it a tourist attraction.

2. TOURISM IN THE DOGON COUNTRY

Dogon culture has fascinated many ethnologists, anthropologists, sociologists and tour operators. They include French researchers like Marcel Griaule, Michel Leiris, André Schaeffner, Jean-Paul Lebeuf, and Germaine Dieterlen, all of whom have done active research on the Dogon people. Two books written by Griaule, *Dieu d'eau (Water God)* (1948) and *Le Renard pâle (The Pale Fox)* (1961), have done much to publicize the Dogon Country. For Brelet (2009), the works of Griaule present the Dogon culture as "a mythology, a metaphysics that is reminiscent of Egypt, perhaps Babylon," as an "adventure of the spirit within the confines of time and thought" and a complex society where the symbolic relations harmoniously articulate the world in its totality (Griaule, 1948, p.141).

Considered an important asset in its nature and culture, UNESCO classified the Bandiagara cliffs in its World Heritage List in 1989. UNESCO describes the Dogon country as follows: The Cliff of Bandiagara, Land of the Dogons, is a vast cultural landscape covering 400,000 ha and includes 289 villages scattered between the three natural regions: sandstone plateau, escarpment, plains (more than two-thirds of the listed perimeter are covered by plateau and cliffs) (UNESCO/CLT/WHC, 2014).

But already in 1938, in his article entitled *The Dogon Masks*, Griaule noted, "the direct intrusion of whites in the activity of masks whose spectacular character was well calculated to draw attention [...], and a common way of adding to the luster of the historical commemorations and official receptions" (Griaule 1938).

The Dogon culture, according Brelet (2009) is now the subject of the economic interests of tourism and the trade in art objects resulting, firstly, in the risk of folklorization at the expense of the sustainable development [...] of people living in this magnificent cliff, in villages carved in rock, and, secondly, the risk of its heritage being looted.

All these socio-cultural factors make Dogon Country a popular destination for tourists visiting Mali. The Netherlands Development Organisation points out in its report that the impact of tourism in reducing poverty today is around 18.6% in the Dogon country (SNV 20012). This means that tourism is a very important sector, one could even say vital, for the community.

3. THE SECURITY CRISIS OF 2012 IN MALI

The socio-political crisis of 2012 plunged Mali into a profound economic and social crisis. The suspension of public

development aid, the abandonment of numerous investment projects, the drastic reduction of resources and budgetary allowances even at the basic level of social services, the closing of numerous businesses, particularly in the domains of the hotel industry and tourism, have all harshly affected the revenues and employment of thousands of people (PNUD-Mali, 2013).

The year 2012 touches the souls of all Malians and all friends of Mali: it is the year of misfortune, people say. On January 17 the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad and other rebels who fought in Colonel Mohamar Kadhafi's (overthrown in 2011) army launched a large offensive in northern Mali. In March 22 of the same year a military coup d'état overthrew the regime of general Amadou Toumani Toure. The military junta who took power justified their actions by claiming the President incompetent in the fight against the rebels and the jihadists. Captain Amadou Haya Sanogo, the head of the mutineers, created the National Committee for the Reinstatement of Democracy and the Restoration of the State (CNRDRE). He dissolved all of the institutions of Mali.

The land-locked country suffered crippling sanctions at the hands of the international community, as indicated by the UNDP. The rebels and jihadists took advantage of this generalized chaos perpetrating a host of persecutory acts against civilians (murders, rapes, pillage, amputations, theft, and the destruction of mausoleums) in the north of the country.

4. HOW DOES POLITICAL CRISIS AFFECT TOURISM?

If the essence of tourism is linked to recreation and relaxation, a country at war is certainly not a preferred destination for tourists. In addition to the personal choice of individuals to travel or not travel, the chancelleries of foreign countries advise their citizens against travelling to Mali. The above map, created by the French Foreign Ministry, indicates that the red zone is dangerous and advises their citizens against travelling there.

The orange zone is also not recommended excepting compelling reasons for travel there. Therefore tourism, which was the third most important sector of Mali's economy, suddenly collapses. Stafford & Sarrasin (2003) explain that, "Tourism is a fragile industry since its evolution remains very sensitive to sudden changes in the social environment; political and economic phenomena have a major influence on its development".

It is this hard fact of fragility that affects Malian tourism today. In a speech given to the newspaper *Le Point*, Sékou Dolo, director of The Troupe of Dogon Masks said, "The economic situation has declined from 50 years ago. We were at the beginning of a tourism development that stopped abruptly. All the industry players have seen it affect their

standard of living, but opinions are divided as some manage to keep a relative balance thanks to relationships with loyal customers who send aid.”

Already in 2009, because of the terrorist threat in northern Mali, the tourism sector was beginning to darken. The antenna of the Malian Office of Tourism and Hospitality based in Mopti announced that: Dogon country, tourist center par excellence in Mali, received only 3,729 tourists in first quarter of 2011 compared to 9552 tourist arrivals for the first quarter of 2010, the period before the crisis triggered by the military coup.

The OMATHO adds that negative data reflect the impact of the political and security crisis on the tourism sector activities of the whole country whose main resources came from tourism.

When there is conflict the number of tourists diminishes. What is interesting to know is: what is the capacity of the state and industry players to deal with it? For this, we need a broad campaign of communication and awareness. The chief of staff of the Malian Ministry of Culture, Handicrafts and Tourism states that people do not have the same sensitivity to conflict. In terms of security Europeans do not have the same expectations or reactions as Africans. For example, when a European is kidnapped it is not uncommon for their countrymen to demonstrate in the street, blaming their government for not taking necessary precautions to protect citizens. This negatively affects domestic politics. To avoid this situation politicians prefer to discourage their citizens from traveling to countries where there is even minimal conflict and will even put pressure on insurance agencies to not insure people travelling to those places.

It only takes the smallest problem in Africa for the international media to show just the negative side of a country. In the case of Mali, the problems in the north are confined to a relatively small geographical area that is isolated from the rest of the country yet the media portrays the entire country as dangerous. In fact there is virtually no risk in the rest of the country. To give an idea of distance, it is 1600 kilometers from the capital, Bamako, to Kidal, the location of the conflict. Mali is a vast. If security is not ensured in the North, tourists can do their sightseeing in the South, East or West. Considering the entire country as dangerous is simply unhealthy (Koreichi, 2015).

Often media coverage can impact the real situation on the ground. When Ebola appeared in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea the media generated the belief that all of West Africa was dangerous. All of West Africa was subsequently put in quarantine. This move affected travel of all kinds and resulted in the closure of schools and other institutions. Ebola killed 10,000 people in one year in all of West Africa. While in Europe the flu killed 81,000 people in three months and no one was put in quarantine.

The way the western media covers events in the west is vastly different from the way it covers events in Africa. The impact is often negative.

In Mali, the crisis manifested in the total abandonment of the destination, the closure of some tourist facilities, the destruction of others and the laying-off of agents and employees (Report of Mali, 2014).

5. CONCLUSION

For the poor and weak countries it is totally unrealistic to consider tourism as a vehicle for fighting poverty because the flow of tourists is tied to security. In the case of Mali, the actors did not anticipate a crisis that would affect the sector. Thus, thousands of workers were left unemployed. In addition to unemployment, the abandonment of Mali as a tourist destination has been fatal to many young guides. As recommended by SNV (Netherlands Organization for Development) (2012) in their report, we must further support the tourism sector by strengthening security measures in the north of the country, and also develop new products and new markets less susceptible to the effects of such crises. The tourism sector must be innovative through the creation and development of new tourist circuits. In the case of Mali, tourism is concentrated in a few areas (Dogon country - Djenne - Timbuktu) while potential exists in other regions that have not yet been appreciated. Thus, we can hope that tourism will resume its 3rd place in the national economy after gold and cotton, even in the era of international jihadism.

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