

1997

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### Recommended Citation

Cohen, Erik (1997) "Tourism-related Crime: Towards a Sociology of Crime and Tourism," *Visions in Leisure and Business*: Vol. 16 : No. 1 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/visions/vol16/iss1/2>

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**TOURISM-RELATED CRIME: TOWARDS A SOCIOLOGY OF  
CRIME AND TOURISM**

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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this article is to: (1) categorize tourist-related crime, (2) relate these types of crimes to current criminological theories, and (3) place tourist-related crime into the broader social context. Through this analysis, a conceptual framework was developed to specify the factors determining the probabilities and the potential rates of success of certain kinds of offenders against different types of tourists in various situations.

**DEFINING THE FIELD**

Tourism-related crime is a moot topic with an ill defined field. "Crime" is a difficult term to define sociologically, while legal definitions, such as "events and actions that are prescribed by the criminal code of a particular country" (10), do not lead to theoretically significant insights and are not always helpful for the sociological study of crime, particularly in the Third World countries. Customary rules entertained by specific groups, such as tribes or ethnic and religious minorities, may define certain actions as "crime", even if these are not legally encoded in the wider society.

The definitional problem is further aggravated in the case of international tourism, because locals and foreigners may entertain very different notions as to what constitutes "crime" or "criminal conduct", since the legal or customary definitions of "crime" in their respective societies may differ substantially.

The scope of "tourism-related crime" remains undefined in the literature. Sociologists of deviance and criminologists, as well as students of tourism have until very recently been concerned merely with crimes against tourists and paid very little attention to the broader field of tourism-related crime as a theoretical issue. Empirical studies on the interface of crime and tourism were rare and offered few cues for possible theory informed generalizations. The first volume of articles solely devoted to the topic was published only in 1996 (20). In this work, an initial attempt has been made towards the formulation of a theoretical approach to tourism-related crime (28). However, although this article contains some important insights and leads for an understanding of changing social conditions impinging upon tourism-related crime, it does not attempt to relate

contemporary criminological theory to the sociology of tourism in order to create the theoretical basis for a genuinely interdisciplinary approach to the interface of tourism and crime. This is the principal intention of the present article.

We begin with a clarification regarding different categories of tourism-related crime:

(1) Crimes of locals against tourists, or tourist-oriented crime; this is the category most frequently dealt with in both quantitative (13, 21, 11) as well as qualitative studies of tourism and crime. It is, for practical reasons, the category of greatest concern to developers of tourist projects and to the authorities concerned with tourism: growth in tourist-oriented crime has a significant negative impact on tourist arrivals in countries of destination and provokes concern for the safety of their citizens in the countries of origin.

(2) Crimes of tourists against locals; this category of "tourists as offenders" has until recently received very little attention in the literature. However, there exist good theoretical reasons, such as the allegedly "liberating", "liminal" or "ludic" (5) nature of tourism, the increased sense of permissiveness of individuals outside the constraints of their home environment, as well as their ignorance regarding local laws and custom, to assume that tourists fairly frequently engage in criminal, illegal or at least deviant behavior at their destination (15, 23).

To this should be added that in recent years a new phenomenon became widespread, which significantly increased the frequency of technically legal offenses committed by foreigners traveling on tourist visas: many arrivals from the Third World and excommunist countries to developed

Western states on such visas, are not in fact bona fide tourists, but illegal immigrants (26), and, in some cases, small time criminals or even members of international crime syndicates, looking for shelter or new fields of activity. While these are important phenomena, they could more appropriately be dealt with under the rubric of migration and crime (25), rather than in the present context.

(3) Crimes of tourists and other foreigners against tourists; this category has not received any attention in the professional literature. However, touristic situations in which large numbers of strangers come together in relatively informal unstructured situations invite "crimes of opportunity" (28), such as small scale larceny; moreover, there are foreigners who enter another country as tourists, in order to prey on other tourists--like for example, foreign--mostly Filipino--card swindlers in Thailand, who seek out wealthy tourists, involve them in gambling and fleece them (9).

(4) Crimes by locals against other locals on tourism-related matters; this category should be included in the field of crime and tourism, even though such crimes do not directly involve tourists: tourism creates new economic opportunities, generates new interests and provokes new kinds of conflict; this may therefore lead to offenses of locals against other locals on such matters as control over access to tourists for business or fraud, control over tourist-oriented supply of prostitutes, or over casinos and gambling dens; conflicts over ownership or possession of land suitable for the location of tourist facilities may also lead to violent crime between locals.

The field of tourism-related crime is thus more complex and much wider than usually assumed; it is also only vaguely bounded,

flowing almost imperceptibly into other fields. Our categorization indicates that the official statistics on crime and tourism underestimate the frequency of the phenomenon, since they ordinarily relate only to one category, tourism oriented crime, while disregarding the others. It should be especially noted that crimes of locals against other locals on tourism-related matters appear to involve more serious and organized criminal activity in some Third World countries than the other categories, including tourist-oriented crime. However this aspect of the interface of crime and tourism remains wholly unexplored.

Since tourist-oriented crime is the best explored of the four categories, it lends itself better than the others for the development of a theoretical approach to the interface of crime and tourism. In this article we shall restrict ourselves to this category; if successful, our approach can then be extended to the other categories. We intend to relate current theories in criminology to some insights of the sociology of tourism, and to adapt those theories to the distinguishing characteristics of touristic phenomena. The focus of our analysis will be the touristic situation, an approach which is well attuned to the current criminological interest in situational analysis (2).

However, we shall develop a model integrating the micro-social situation into the wider, macrosocial context of the society of origin of the tourist, the tourist system and the host society.

### **CRIME AND THE TOURISTIC SITUATION**

An implication of all the major theories of victimization, such as that of techniques of

neutralization (27), opportunity theory (2) and routine activities theory (18) is that tourists are relatively easy and attractive victims of crime and particularly of predatory criminal activity (17, 24). In their early article on techniques of neutralization, Sykes and Matza (27) claim that the delinquents' awareness of their victim is weakened if the latter is an unknown, vague abstraction. While criminals do not necessarily lack moral restraints (2), such restraints appear to be less effective if the victim is depersonalized. Depersonalization typically accompanies the development of mass tourism (28). Locals tend to entertain personalized relations with "paying guests" at the early stages of touristic penetration of a locality. However, according to Pi-Sunyer (19), as increased numbers of foreigners visit a locality, "it becomes progressively harder for residents to differentiate between them on personalistic criteria". Hence, with "the growth of mass tourism, traditional stereotypes are applied to all foreigners"; the tourist is then perceived as "a stranger... devoid of his essential individuality and human qualities. He or she is faceless" (19). Under such circumstances, locals appear to have few qualms when they over-charge or deceive tourists (19), or even when they rob them.

Another factor which may help to neutralize the locals' attitude to tourists as potential victims, is the nature of the stereotype of "the tourist" frequently entertained by locals in developed touristic destinations and particularly in countries of the Third World "pleasure periphery" (29). Tourists are usually seen as immensely rich, but also stingy and exploitative; hence in the locals' view, cheating or robbing them will not seriously hurt them; and if it does, this may be perceived more as a rightful retribution than a wrongful act.

The last point links up with the principal argument of opportunity theorists regarding potential victims of crime: according to those opportunity theorists who emphasize the situational selection of victims by offenders, ease of access, risk of being caught, and expected reward are the principal factors influencing the selection of victims (2). To this should be added a factor emphasized by routine activity theorists, namely, exposure of the victims, particularly their physical visibility to potential offenders (2).

In all these respects, mass tourists appear to be potentially most suitable victims. Though they may be "faceless", they are far from imperceptible; rather, they are usually highly conspicuous and easily recognizable even in a crowd, by their bearing, attire and conduct. They are also relatively easy of access: most tourists frequent well-known, often crowded destinations, by well-defined routes. Alternatively, some risk-taking tourists wander into "hot spots" (Herman et al., 1989, 24) of criminal activity, such as risqué entertainment areas, illegal casinos and brothels (23), in quest of "experiences"; by thus exposing themselves they become easy targets for local offenders.

It should be noted that local offenders can expect relatively high rewards from robbing tourists since they usually carry on their person cash, foreign currency, travelers checks, jewelry or other valuables to a much greater extent than most locals. Moreover, local offenders run little risk of being apprehended or punished for their deeds. While victims are generally reluctant to report crimes committed against them (14), tourists are even more reluctant than locals to do so: they have little time, scant knowledge of local legal procedures and are often wary of being exploited or further victimized by the local police (6). However,

even if apprehended, offenders run a low risk of being brought to trial, because their victims, the tourists, are usually not available to witness against them in court, having left the country a long time ago. Most tourists are reluctant to spend the time and effort to return to the host country merely for the trial of their offenders.

Routine activity theory is another important current criminological theory, which can be adapted to the study of touristic situations. Routine activity theory is based on a premise which makes it particularly relevant, albeit with a peculiar twist, to the study of crime and tourism, and helps to link contemporary victimological theory with the sociology of tourism: according to this theory, victimization rates are a function of risk factors inherent in the situations entered by potential victims in the course of their everyday, routine activities, such as work and leisure (2). Tourism is a paradoxical phenomenon in this respect: from the perspective of the individual tourist it is a non-routine activity (4), a break-away from every day, ordinary life (11). At first glance, therefore, routine activity theory does not appear applicable to tourists. The twist, however, is that although most tourists might perceive and experience their trip as a non-routine and unique one, tourism is a mass phenomenon: in terms of routes, activities, use of accommodations and of other facilities, tourist flows are highly routinized and the behavior of mass tourists is fairly predictable. It is important to note that the very fact that tourists frequently fail to perceive the routinized character of their apparently unique experiences, exposes them to risks of which they remain unaware to a much greater extent than they would under comparable circumstances at home. The often ludic or playful attitude (5) which many tourists entertain towards their surroundings during "vacations", and the eager-

ness of some to engage playfully in risqué behavior, increases the chance that they may fall victim to a criminal act. Owing to the relative naivety of many mass tourists abroad they offer more convenient opportunities for offense by local--and even foreign--criminals, than do locals under the same circumstances.

Routine activity theory postulates that the exposure of attractive victims to risk is countervailed by "guardianship", which is defined, rather broadly, as "the effectiveness of persons and objects in preventing violations [offenses] from occurring" (8).

The concept of "guardianship" is a vague one and in need of further specification. In the domain of tourism, two principal kinds of guardianship can be distinguished: those provided by the host society and those provided by the tourist system.

For the present purposes both types of "guardianship" can be usefully further divided into three main types: directives, protective agencies and barriers: "Directives" consist of warnings and advice given to tourists with regard to temptations and dangers in the host society.

"Protective agencies" are the "guardians" in the narrow sense of the term: rules, institutions and roles intended to protect the tourists.

"Barriers" are institutional and physical arrangements intended to reduce access to tourists by potential offenders or reduce the attractiveness of tourists as victims.

Safety is one of the principal considerations in the choice of destinations by tourists. Local unrest, terrorism and crime are significant deterrents of tourism (12). Host countries therefore seek to project a safe and

secure image, and to take measures to provide tourists with protection against potential offenders.

The host society's guardianship of tourists consists primarily of "directives" and "protective agencies". The authorities of tourist destinations advise tourists on "proper" or inoffensive conduct, and warn them of potential safety threats. In Thailand, for example, the authorities produced posters, warning tourists of the gems confidence game (7), or advised vacationers on islands on proper attire outside bathing areas, in order not to provoke the hostility of the local population. Local tourist authorities may also warn visitors that some local merchants tend to overcharge them, and advise them to patronize "safe" businesses--especially those which have received the official tag of approval; however, such tags can sometimes also be surreptitiously misused to cheat tourists (7).

The "protective agencies" providing guardianship to tourists consist of laws and regulations, and the institutions charged with their enforcement. Most of these are general in nature and apply only incidentally to tourists. Thus, the police, the principal law enforcement agency in most countries, is supposed to provide protection and assistance to all individuals under its jurisdiction. However, since tourists often encounter different problems than the locals and may be exposed to other--and more serious--threats, special agencies have been created in some countries for their protection, especially a "tourist police". This force is supposed to be better able than the local police to communicate with the tourists in their own or in an international language, and to be trained to assist them with their particular problems. Nevertheless, police protection provided to tourists is often deficient, particularly in many Third World

countries. Extortion of tourists by local police is not uncommon, as is collusion between policemen and offenders in cheating or robbing tourists (6).

The tourist system tends to reinforce, complement or even substitute for the "guardianship" of the host country. It disseminates directives in various ways: guide books often contain some directives as to the "dos and don'ts" at the destination. Travel and tourist agencies provide brochures, and other printed and oral information intended to help visitors gain some initial orientation at the destination regarding threats and pitfalls. This is sometimes complemented at the destination itself by warnings regarding specific dangers and "hot spots" of tourist-oriented crime, provided by the local personnel of touristic establishments and services.

However, the principal types of guardianship by the tourist system are the "protective agencies" and "barriers", which provide and secure the "environmental bubble" enveloping the tourists, and particularly the mass tourists, in their host setting (3). The main "protective agents" are security personnel in tourist hotels and resorts, and a variety of tourist-oriented roles, such as tour-leaders and guides, who accompany and shepherd tourists and are responsible for their safety. "Barriers" intended to hinder offenders from access to the tourists and their valuables, range from "defensive" building of hotels and resorts (18), to a variety of "physical security devices" (1), such as sophisticated locks, surveillance systems and safes for guests' valuables.

The extent of guardianship provided by both the host society and the tourist system differs according to the tourists' mode of travel, that is, the type of tourists: it appears

to be densest and least penetrable in the case of conventional mass tourists, and sparsest in the case of non-conventional tourists such as drifters or "back-packers" (3); the latter also appear to be less protected and sometimes even persecuted, by the local law-enforcing agencies, which seem to care more for the security and well-being of the former (6). However, the conventional, better protected tourists are also the wealthiest ones, and hence more desirable objects of predatory crime. This opens an intriguing possibility: namely, that the very guardians of these tourists, the law enforcing agencies, ostensibly appointed to protect those tourists, may overtly use their position and power to victimize them, or to extend protection or assistance to offenders, while sharing part of the proceeds (7). The extent to which representatives of these agencies, such as the police, who come into direct contact with tourists, are able to exploit their position is a function of the degree of connivance between them and their superiors--i.e., the extent to which corruption is common in the higher echelons of the force. Insofar as corruption is limited only to the lower echelons, it will be difficult for them to attempt to victimize the well-to-do conventional tourists with impunity; hence victimization by the police will be limited to the more marginal, less protected, but also relatively impecunious, drifters and other non-conventional youth tourists. Insofar as corruption permeates the police force as a whole, wealthy conventional tourists may well become victimized with the connivance of the police.

#### **A GENERAL MODEL OF TOURIST-ORIENTED CRIME**

Our preceding discussion has dealt with crime in the touristic situation and with the boundary factors--the two kinds of guard-

ianship intended to curb access of criminals to tourists and their valuables, and to protect tourists against criminals. However, although in the spirit of much recent criminology the touristic situation is the focus of our approach, it does not stand by itself. It has to be related to its broader social context. We therefore propose a general model (Fig. 1) for the study of tourist-orientated crime, which specifies systematically the principal macro-social factors impinging upon the microsocial situations of potential encounters between tourists and criminals. The model lays out the string of mutually related factors, emanating from the society of origin on the one hand, and from the host society on the other, which impinge upon the touristic situation. We assume that these factors will determine the probability of certain kinds of attempted offenses against different types of tourists in various touristic situations, and that the relative success of such attempts will depend upon the effectiveness of the two types of guardianship.

Our model proposes that some broad background factors--here subsumed under the rubric of "economic and socio-cultural characteristics"--of both, the host society (A1) and of the society of origin (B1), significantly influence, respectively, the crimogenic culture" of the hosts (A2) and the nature of the potential tourist population in the country of origin. The crimogenic culture, in turn, influences the principal kinds of local criminality and thereby constitutes the immediate context from which emerge the various types of tourist-orientated criminality (A3); while from among the potential tourist population will emerge the specific types of tourists travelling to a particular destination (B3). Finally, from among the tourist-orientated criminals will emerge the specific offenders seeking to enter the touristic situation under

consideration (A5); while from among the tourists at the destination will emerge the particular individuals who enter that touristic situation (B5), and who become potential victims of criminal encounters (C1). The background factors, in our view, thus determine the probability of certain kinds of attempted criminal offenses against particular types of tourists in different touristic situations. The actual frequency of attempted offenses and the rate of their success, however, will be mitigated by the effectiveness of the two kinds of guardianship: that of the host society (A4) on the one hand and that of the tourist system (B4) on the other. The touristic situation (C) thus remains at the focus of our approach, but the other components of the model stipulate the series of factors which filter access to that situation of both, potential offenders and potential victims, and determine the probability of offenses and of their rate of success.

## CONCLUSION

In this article we pursued three principal aims: (1) To distinguish several categories of tourist related crime; (2) to relate one of these categories, tourist-orientated crime, to current criminological theories; and (3) to place the touristic situation--which constitutes the focus of most of these theories--within a broader social context. This led us to the formulation of a general model for the study of tourist-orientated crime.

It must be stressed that ours is a conceptual model and not a generative one: it does not seek to explain how tourism-orientated crime is generated, but only specifies the factors determining the probabilities, and the potential rates of success, of certain kinds of offenders against different types of tourists in various situations.



The principal contribution of the model is in its clarification of the relationship between structural, macro- and situational micro-factors in the study of tourist-oriented crime; it thereby helps to lift the study of the "situation" from its isolation. A host of specific theoretical and comparative problems can be raised with regard to this relationship, and with regard to the role played by the two kinds of guardianship in controlling crime in touristic situations: for example, problems regarding differences in the kind and rate of offenses against tourists in comparable situations in host countries differing in their basic characteristics (A1), or in their criminogenic cultures (A2); problems regarding such differences with respect to tourists hailing from different social backgrounds (B1), or with respect to different types of tourists coming from the same backgrounds (B3); or problems regarding the relative effectiveness of different kinds of guardianship with respect to particular kinds of offenses against different types of tourists in various situations.

Particularly significant problems can be raised with regard to the relationship between the two kinds of guardianship: for example, do they generally tend to supplement each other or to overlap--so that some kinds of tourists, particularly wealthy mass tourists tend to be over-protected while other, less conventional or less affluent tourists tend to be under-protected.

Finally, the proposed model could also serve as a proto-type for similar models for the study of the other categories of tourism-related crime listed above. This would facilitate the integration of the investigation of these neglected phenomena into the conceptual and theoretical framework of the study of the interface of crime and tourism, as well as help to expand the scope of comparative research in this increasingly important field.

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Figure 1

General Model for the Study of Tourist-Oriented Crime

