The Blakeley Model applied to improving a tourist destination: An exploratory study. The case of Haiti

Abstract

The development of the tourism industry is one of the main priorities of the Haitian government. However, the destination still has the image of an unsecure destination where the worst is likely to happen. This exploratory study (based on the Blakeley Model), highlights the gap between the negative image of the destination perceived by tourists and the optimistic image of the Haitian government: this is referred to as a '*blind spot'* (a gap between people's perceptions and actual reality). The overall conclusion is that Haiti should engage in a pre-visitation marketing strategy to change the negative image of the destination.

Keywords

Blakeley Model; Blind Spot; Tourism; Marketing; Haiti

1. INTRODUCTION

Haiti used to be called the pearl of the Antilles (Séraphin, 2014). In 1957, the dictatorship and the atmosphere of terror promoted by Francois Duvalier and his 'Tontons Macoutes', crippled the tourism industry of the country (Séraphin, 2011). The political instability led to the country gaining a reputation as an unsafe tourist destination and even before the January 2010 earthquake, Haiti was one of the poorest countries in the world. The negative image of the country acted as a deterrent to foreign investors and discouraged any form of economic development (Séraphin, 2012). Unlike the Dominican Republic, which is the most visited island in the Caribbean (Caribbean Tourism Organisation (CTO), 2016), Haiti continues to be perceived as an unsafe destination, (Séraphin, 2014). These observations give rise to important strategic questions regarding the kind of communication and marketing strategies that should be developed in order to improve Haiti's image as a tourist destination.

In attempting to change visitors' image of Haiti, a re-education effort needs to be implemented highlighting discrepancies between people's perception of the country and the current reality. These gaps between people's perceptions and actual reality are known as 'blind spots' and can be very difficult to change. Using different examples of organisations, Blakeley (2007: 21) pointed out that 'blind spots are areas where we resist learning (…) and

prevent us from adapting and learning'. (Blakeley, 2007: 35). There are multiple sources of this resistance ranging from fear and defense, through to lack of motivation to engage in the learning processes that are needed to change. This paper therefore adapts Blakeley's 'four key processes of model of learning' (2007) to a tourism context, with a final objective of suggesting an effective marketing strategy to reduce or remove the 'blind spots' that prevent tourists being attracted towards the destination.

There are a limited number of contemporary models of crisis management which provide guidance to destination and business managers and planners prior to, during and after a crisis event (Speakman & Sharpley, 2012). It is argued here that by implementing a marketing strategy to educate the general public prior to visiting Haiti, it could increase visitor numbers. Existing research on informing and educating tourists focuses on the visit itself, but generally neglects the pre-visit stage. There has been a very limited effort to educate tourists (Séraphin, 2013a; Ballengee-Morris, 2002; Orams, 1996) and the focus of this study will be to attempt to suggest solutions for increasing this effort. For all these reasons this paper can be considered as innovative.

The other major contribution of this research paper is that it analyses tourism and tourists, not only in post-conflict destinations, a newly emerging sub-field of tourism studies, (Alvarez and Campo, 2014 & 2011; Novelli, Morgan & Nibigira, 2012), but also in post-disaster and post-colonial

destinations. These three features of countries/destinations can coincide, but yet, have not been analysed together in their impact upon a destination.

The research questions are formulated as follows: (a) Why is it important to educate people about Haiti and more generally, why is it important to educate people about post-colonial, post-conflict and post-disaster destinations? (b) What method/media should be used to educate people? (c) And finally, what is the role of the Blakeley Model in this strategy?

This paper is based on a synthesis of the relevant literature organised around four main sections. Firstly, the Haitian context is set out. Then the conceptual framework considers some key ideas and perspectives from the literature (Quinlan, 2011). In the methodology and results section, a framework to educate potential visitors is suggested. Finally, the conclusion provides clear, albeit provisional, answers to our research questions, and provides suggestions for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Communication in Tourism

Communication includes: Word-of-mouth reporting; media reporting and image making; advertising and promotion; news accounts; conversation with friends and relatives; Public Relations (PR); sponsorship; social media; internet

(Seddighi, Nuttall & Theocharus, 2001). On top of this, specific to tourism, travel agents and past experience are current methods that effectively educate tourists (Ibid.). In addition to this, a more subtle strategy directed at the affective realm (feelings and emotions) is key to tourists' education when it comes to choosing a holiday destination (Alvarez & Campo, 2014). An aggressive marketing and promotional strategy for destinations suffering from the legacy of political instability, as suggested by Seddighi et al (2001), does not appear as a solution and therefore such destinations often fail in their objectives (Alvarez & Campo, 2014).

The objective here is to show that when people have a better knowledge of the true nature of a destination (history, tradition, context, etc), they are more likely to visit it, because they will be less open to distortions, exaggerations and unbalanced accounts (Séraphin, 2014). For example, Gossling (2003:54) showed that in Martinique, 'repeat visitors [were] more resilient to weather extremes, as 'weather' loses importance with continued visitation'. These repeat visitors do not dismiss the threat of storms, but are knowledgeable enough to put it in context as a small, but not defining, factor in their choices. This suggests that the lack of experience and/or ignorance of a destination can lead to the acceptance of misleading narratives of risk. Education can play an important role in countering such narratives.

Taking the example of the Arab Spring, Avraham (2015) explains that different methods have been used by Middle Eastern countries to improve their image: censuring media, threatening news people, and organising events to shift the international media attention from a negative position to something more positive. For Alvarez & Campo (2014), these types of destinations should adopt crisis management strategies more fully and develop a better understanding of the factors that influence the image of their country, thus attempt to improve feelings and emotions of the potential target market towards the destination.

Taking the example of Turkey, Alvarez and Campo (2011), highlighted the great impact of promotional video/information (controllable sources) as a way to improve a destination image, particularly when the media and journalists (which are uncontrollable sources) often emphasise the negative aspects.

Destination branding is therefore extremely important in helping to improve a negative image. For example, post conflict, Montenegro rebranded itself as an ecological state by focusing on its environmental quality to embellish its image (Vitic & Ringer, 2008). Other methods include: communication with the tourism market using an effective disaster recovery message; using festivals and other types of events; celebrity endorsement; testimonials from guests and a good pricing strategy (Walters & Mair, 2012).

2.2 Educating Tourists

Whilst the above solutions focus on the destination, this research is interested in exploring solutions focused on the tourist. Taking the example of Guarani, a post-colonial community located in Brazil, Ballengee-Morris (2002) suggested that involvement with the locals or visits to local attractions could help mitigate any negative perceptions (Orams, 1996). Séraphin (2013a) explained the role played by tour guides in Haiti as being extremely important to enable a better understanding for visitors of the country. These simple examples are based on the education of tourists while they are at the destination, at the visit stage.

The approach in this paper is novel as it analyses the matter from the pre-visitation angle. The pre-visitation stage is an important phase of information processing and is shaped by personal knowledge and other third party information (Hubner & Gossling, 2012). Indeed, 'international incidents, terrorist attacks or natural disasters also play a role in shaping a place's image, since they change the existing knowledge that a person might have about the area' (Alvarez & Campo, 2014:70). Based on pre-visit information, it is very important to make people knowledgeable about the place through exposure to truthful information that can counter the exaggeration of risk and other negative preconceptions developed within the tourists' own culture. Walters & Mair (2012: 87) put it succinctly: Communication with the tourism market and the

tourist ‘is essential for a Destination Marketing Organisation seeking to manage the misperceptions and media-imposed attitudes held by potential visitors’.

A country’s image is defined by ‘The impression that a person or persons hold about a country in which they do not reside’ (O’Sullivan, 1996, cited in Seddighi et al, 2001). This impression is mostly formed through an individual’s affective disposition rather than simply through a cognitive one (Alvarez & Campo, 2014). The approach suggested in this paper is to make visitors more knowledgeable by appealing to their affective impulses (feelings and emotions), thus developing a clear strategy which takes this into account (Seddighi et al, 2001).

Logically, the education of potential tourists of post-colonial, post-conflict and post-disaster destinations could challenge media reinforced clichés and false preconceptions, and promote a clearer, more positive view. Education can contribute to turn potential tourists into actual tourists, as well as enhancing the experience of the tourists too.

Whilst tourism education is generally seen only from students’, academics’, practitioners’ and employers’ angle (Dale & Robinson, 2001), this article considers it as a pre-visit marketing tool, explicitly countering false or exaggerated negative notions relating to colonialism, disasters and conflicts of the past (both distant and recent).

2.3. Lifelong learning in tourism

Lifelong learning is defined as any kind of continuing education in shorter or longer courses, and includes formal, non-formal and informal education and learning (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974). It focuses on key features such as human skills and aptitude development, and contextualised learning that can enhance the 'competency and confidence to cope with the urgent tasks and changes arising throughout a lifetime' (Longworth, 2003:7).

Lifelong learning has been part of the education debate since the 1960s and owes its root to lifelong education. In the 1990s the concept of lifelong learning gained prominence and was promoted as a process of individual learning and development across one's life-span (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 1996). It is prominent in educational discourse and policy throughout the Western world.

The concept of lifelong learning is of high significance to the tourism industry. In 1994, the National Advisory Council for Education and Training Targets identified the role played by training and education in the performance of a nation. Hence, generally, lifelong learning is related to employee skills and economic efficiency for tourism providers. However, ever since Krippendorf's (1987) call for tourists to be educated about the destinations they visit in order to create a more ethical tourism, ethical tourism advocates have argued that this is a moral goal for the industry. Tourism education should deal not only with

knowledge that is of importance to learners' careers and companies (instrumental knowledge), but also to the societies in which they operate and the destinations (Dwyer, Cvelbar, Edwards & Mihalic, 2011; Lewis, 2005; Hegarty, 1990).

Some research suggests that lifelong learning involving knowledge of destinations impacts positively on performance (Séraphin, 2012). Such an approach to lifelong learning entails a new, open and innovative attitude toward education through tourism, in this case at the pre-visit stage. For specific destinations, specific measures must be taken (Gay, 2012; Huang, Tseng & Petrick, 2008 cited in Walters & Mair, 2012; Sonmez, 1998).

2.4. Developing brand loyalty for post-colonial, post-conflict and post-disaster destinations (PCCD destinations)

Consumer behaviour can be defined as behaviour that consumers demonstrate whilst searching for, buying, using, evaluating and disposing of services and products that are expected to satisfy their needs (Schiffman, Kanuk & Wisenblit, 2010). Research suggests that both positive and negative emotions can be a potential driver for impulse purchasing, especially so with non-essential or luxury goods such as fashion or holidays (Park, Kim & Forney, 2006).

Kirillova, Fu, Lehto & Cai (2014) explained that what tourists consider as aesthetically pleasing or beautiful (environment, product or services, tourism

experience) contributes to their decision whether to visit a destination, whether to return to the same destination and in the long term to show loyalty to that destination. This aesthetic case for Haiti rarely reaches potential tourists due to the media focus on risks arising from disasters, conflict and the nation's postcolonial status (Séraphin, 2014).

Importantly for this study though, Carlson's natural environment model (1979) and the arousal model developed by Caroll (1995), both cited in Kirillova et al (2014), suggest that knowledge and objectivity about the environment can influence appreciation. Their analysis implies that objective knowledge and exposure to more balanced narratives influence the way potential tourists approach destination choice not just based on a cognitive / rational basis, but also on an affective one. Hence the education of tourists can be considered as a way to facilitate a more favorable affective disposition towards destinations such as Haiti.

Also pertinent here is Connell's view (cited in Stepchenkova, 2012) that non-promotional communications can be more powerful than more explicitly promotional ones. For specific destinations, specific measures need to be taken (Gay, 2012; Huang, Tseng & Petrick, 2008 cited in Walters & Mair, 2012; Sonmez, 1998). Appealing to education and a desire for knowledge rather than romantic imagery and persuasive prose could be more effective in undermining the predisposition to view PCCD destinations such as Haiti through a dark lens.

Buying behaviour can be classified by two criteria: the degree of customer involvement and the degree of customer rationality (Doyle, 2002). As depicted in Table 3, it can be said that tourists going to PCCD destinations are highly involved in their purchase decisions. Therefore, it is unlikely that they would resist learning about the destination, and even more unlikely to resist an educational marketing strategy.

Table 3: Six Types of Buying Behaviour (Doyle, 2002: 249)

		Degree of Rationality	
		High (Thinking)	Low (Feeling)
Degree of Involvement	High	Extensive Problem Solving	Image
	Medium	Limited Problem solving	Sensual
	Low	Routine	Impulse

3. CONTEXT

3.1 *Haiti: An overview*

The tourism sector is especially vulnerable to exogenous factors such as political instability, economic crisis, natural disasters and the outbreak of diseases (Hai & Chick, 2011; Ritchie, Dorrell, Miller & Miller, 2004). Those factors can cause destinations to decline and sometimes even totally disappear

from the tourism map (Seddighi et al, 2001). In this respect tourism is a problematic industry (Getz, 2008).

Today Haiti is one of the poorest countries in the world. Indicators point to a very poor level of human development: life expectancy (53 years), infant mortality (80%), maternal mortality (523 per 100.000 live births), and adult illiteracy (50%) and unemployment among the active population (around 60%) etc. To add to this, approximately 65% of the population lives below the poverty threshold (Roc, 2008). Haiti, as is the case for many states with post-colonial legacy, has to face deficient security, disorganised law and order institutions, the use of violence by state and non-state actors, the incapacity or the unwillingness of the government to provide basic services to the population, and a poor economic environment.

Internal factors are not solely responsible for the state's weakness - International interventions have also had negative effects. Haiti has had little influence on the design of its own public policies and its economy is largely shaped by outside forces. Power has tended to reside in the hands of foreign institutions. In particular, since the early 1980s, structural adjustment has involved a transfer of sovereignty from Haiti to international financial institutions in return for assistance with debt.

In today's global economy, Haiti's main competitive advantages have been its abundance of low-wage, unskilled workers and its proximity to the

USA. Haiti can therefore be classified as a weak State: its structures lack political will and/or the capacity to provide the basic functions needed for poverty reduction, development and to safeguard the security and human rights of its population. The weak governance and absence of accountability has facilitated the creation of parallel economies and patterns of patronage and corruption (Gauthier & Moita, 2010).

3.2 Image formation of Haiti and roles of the media

The image people have of Haiti is mainly generated by organic agents (the image developed by personal experience) and autonomous agents (the image developed by the media). The role of induced agents (a promotional campaign) hardly contributes to the image of Haiti, undoubtedly due to the lack of money. Very little is done by the Destination Marketing Organisation (DMO) in Haiti.

The other key issue is based on the product itself: because of the very nature of the political and social situation of Haiti, how can the DMO communicate about the product to improve its image? In other words, if the image developed by the media (autonomous agent) and the image developed by personal experience (organic agent) are negative, is there any point in developing a promotional campaign (induce agent) to encourage people to come to the destination?

It sounds realistic that if the image conveyed by the media and visitors who have been to the place are negative, the promotional campaign to improve the image of the destination will only work if the first two agents responsible for the formation of the image of a destination are under control by the DMO. Once these are under control, the destination can start thinking about working on the last one – the promotional campaign. Haiti needs to take ownership or control of its image via a marketing strategy to correct its positioning and improve its image. It has been shown that appropriate marketing action taken can change the image of a destination (Walters & Mair, 2012).

The following tables (Table 1 & Table 2) summarise the key issues affecting Haiti and its tourism sector. These have a serious impact on the image of the destination.

Table 1: Major issues within the tourism sector in Haiti

Author(s)	Year	Theme	Summary
Théodat	2004	Quality of the products and services	Haiti is still an amateur when it comes to tourism
Thernil	2004	Rejection of tourism	The locals do not perceive tourism as a 'godsend' for the country
Doré	2010	Training and courses in Tourism	There is a lack of quality training in the tourism and hospitality sector in Haiti
Séraphin	2013a	History of slavery and customer service	Customer service is also a major issue as a result of the slave trade, which is ultimately attributable to low levels of trust
Séraphin, Butler & Gowreesunkar	2013	Entrepreneurship and tourism	The lack of funding has constraining impacts on the development of social enterprise and enterprise in general
Thomson	2014	Poor quality products and services and limited positive impacts on the tourism industry	All the sectors of the tourism sector need to be improved. The locals are not really benefitting from the industry

Table 2: Major issues in Haiti

Author(s)	Year	Title books/articles	Summary
Ève di Chiara	1988	*Le dossier Haïti, un pays en péril* [Haiti : A country in danger]	Haiti has endured centuries of instability, social and economic crisis
Manigat	1995a, 1995b	*La crise haïtienne contemporaine* [Contemporary Haitian crisis]	
Debray	2004	La Face noire des lumières [The dark side]	
Roc	2008	Haiti-Environment: From the 'Pearl of the Antilles' to desolation	
Higate & Henry	2009	Insecure spaces, peacekeeping, power and performance in Haiti, Kosovo and Liberia.	Haiti is not a safe country
Audibert	2010	*Cinq siècles de tragedies* [Five centuries of tragedy]	Haiti has endured centuries of instability, social and economic crisis
Bonnet	2010	L'ile aux tragedies [The tragic island]	Haiti has endured centuries of naturally and human induced crisis
Fleurimond	2010	*Tout un territoire à réorganiser* [A territory to reorganise]	Lack of leadership in Haiti Poor organisation of the country
Gauthier, A., Moita	2010	Vulnerability and causes of fragility in Haiti	Haiti has endured centuries of natural and human induced crisis
Geffrard	2010	*Un gouvernement sans forces ni moyens* [A powerless government]	Haiti does not have the mean of its ambitions
Girault	2010	*Deux cents ans de malheur* [Two hundred years of tragegy]	Haiti has endured centuries of naturally and human induced crisis
Broudic	2012	Security in Haiti: an impossible dialogue?	Haiti is not a safe country

Blind spots occur when no change or learning takes place, this is due to an attempt to remain in a comfort zone in order to preserve existing constructs, emotional orientations and behaviour (Blakeley, 2007). The purpose of Tables 1 and 2 is to show that *'much has changed, but in some ways, nothing has changed'* (Thomson, 2014:15) over the years. As there is no change in the pattern in Haiti, it can be argued that there is no change in the tourists' perception of the destination. In other words, blind spots remain in tourists' perception too.

4. METHODOLOGY

As an exploratory study aiming at establishing a strategy to educate tourists going to Haiti at the pre-visitation stage, the approach is threefold:

(1) Recapping the key points of the literature review

(2) Using existing models and theory (i.e. Blakeley model)

(3) Merging the information collected in the above two points to develop a strategy that could potentially be used by destinations with a similar profile to Haiti's.

4.1. Summary of situation so far

1. There are major issues in Haiti (mainly political, economic and social) which impact on the tourism industry
2. To encourage people to visit Haiti, it is important to use a non-promotional communication strategy
3. Potential visitors to the destination need to be educated at a pre-visitation stage

4.2. Why the Blakeley model?

The Blakeley model was first undertaken to address the question of how people learn or resist learning when their organisation goes through changes (Blakeley, 2007: 23). As part of this model, blind spots are identified, that is to say, areas where people or organisations resist learning and prevent them from

adapting and/or learning (Blakeley, 2007: 22). As the limited research about tourism management in Haiti has highlighted the same issues over the years: safety, poor customer services, lack of equipment (Séraphin, 2015a, 2014; Théodat, 2004; Dupont, 2004), it is clear that Haiti, the Haitians, their leaders and the different stakeholders of the tourism and hospitality sector, are resisting learning. It is therefore important to identify the blind spots:

1. The Blakeley model also offers a participative approach to find solution to the blind spots using a stop-start process (Blakeley, 2007: 35);
2. The Blakeley model is quite flexible. It was developed using two organisations which are totally different from each other in terms of size, sector of activity, qualification of staff and culture. An application to the tourism industry is therefore not too different;
3. The Blakeley model is perfect for a situation that has been the same for a long time and where changes are required.

As the image of Haiti developed by the media (autonomous agent) and the image developed by personal experience (organic agent) are negative, there are also blind spots from the tourists' side. Before developing a promotional campaign (induce agent) to encourage people to come to the destination, it is important to identify the blind spots from tourists' and the destinations' sides. It is all the more important as there is a gap between the way the destination perceives itself and the way the outsiders perceive it. This difference of

perception is due to the fact that when branding a destination, more attention is directed to how the nation perceives itself than to how the nation is perceived by outsiders (Olins & Hildreth, 2011). The old and new logo of the Haitian DMO (figure 1 & 2) reflects this difference of perception (Séraphin, Ambaye, Gowreesunkar & Bonnardel, 2016). Nothing has changed in Haiti (Maguire, 2014) and yet the new logo gives the image of a paradise island (Séraphin, 2014, 2011). Educating potential visitors about the destination at a pre-visitation stage can be an option to reduce this difference of perception.

Figure 1: First Haitian DMO logo (1939)

Figure 2: Second Haitian DMO logo (2012)

4.3. About the Blakeley model

There are many barriers to learning, some of which are systemic (e.g. lack of opportunity, a culture that does not support learning, lack of exposure to environmental change) and some rooted in individual psychology such as cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) or Freudian defense mechanisms (Illeris, 2009). When an individual (or system) fails to learn, representations and understandings of reality no longer function effectively as changes that have taken place in the environment fail to be incorporated into the learner's mental representations of the world (Barr, Stimpert & Huff, 1992).

There is a general consensus that people defend themselves against learning when the content of that learning is in some way uncomfortable or threatening to the self. Failure to learn then results in blind spots which can be defined as 'a regular tendency to repress, distort, dismiss or fail to notice information, views or ideas in a particular area that results in…[failure] to learn, change or grow in responses to changes in that area' (Blakeley, 2007: 6).

There are many models of learning in adulthood (Mezirow, 1990; Argyris, 1976; Schon, 1983) but the one elaborated on here is Blakeley's, which places the issues of 'blind spots' and defense mechanisms as central to the understanding of learning process (Blakeley, 2007). Learning, according to this model, comprises four key processes: paying attention to a cue, experiencing emotions, sense-making and generating behaviour in a way that results in new

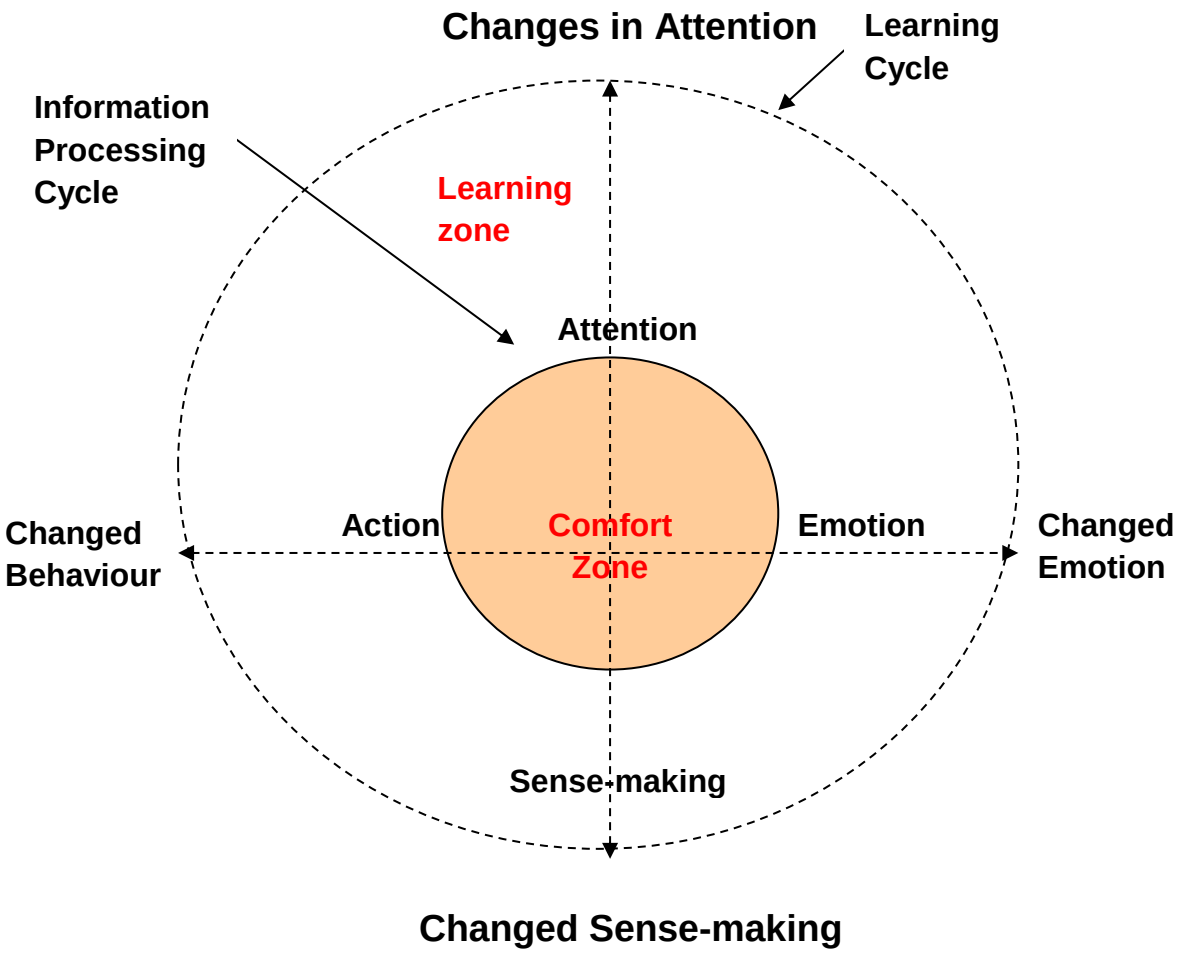
or changed beliefs, behaviour or emotional orientations (such as increased self-confidence or openness to change). Learning only results when the individual notices new and different cues, or makes sense of cues in a way that generates new constructs, beliefs, emotions or behaviour.

This can be better seen in figure 2: the inner circle represents normal information processing. When individuals pay attention to familiar cues, experience emotions, make sense and take action in ways that involve no change, then they are in the comfort zone, drawing on existing knowledge and skills in order to survive and achieve goals within the environment. When they pay attention to new cues, learn new emotions in relation to cues (e.g. increasing self-confidence in relation to a skill), make sense in ways that expand understanding and change behaviour, they step outside of the comfort zone and into the learning zone; here they start to experience a range of emotions, depending on how novel the learning is, or how threatening it is to the self. If people do not step outside the comfort zone and engage with these emotions however, they do not learn. The greater the ability to do this, the greater the learning that takes place. This then contributes towards the expansion of cognitive, emotional and behavioural resources that enable learners to adapt and be ready for the complex, changing world in which they live.

Because the Haitians have no dreams or hopes and instead are living with past memories (Wagner, 2015), ‘emotions’ and ‘change of emotions’ are problematic. The same can be said for ‘action’ and ‘change of behaviour’ as the

leaders don't care about the well-being of their people. Subsequently nothing has been done to improve their standard of living, resulting in a population for whom basic needs are not fulfilled (Wagner, 2015). This situation has led to a 'brain-drain' (Wagner 2015). Because of this, it has been very difficult for Haiti to keep up with all the changes in the tourism industry and in other sectors. For instance, informality of businesses is still a norm in Haiti (Wagner, 2015). Based on this analysis, it is obvious that Haiti as a destination, has remained in its comfort zone (Maguire 2014; Thomson, 2004). The population is a key ingredient to the success of the tourism industry as a sector. But, because the Haitian population are faced with unfavorable living conditions, quite understandably they have other concerns than welcoming tourists. Haiti is not ready for the tourism industry yet (Darwling-Carter, 2010).

Figure 3: The Blakeley Model (2007)

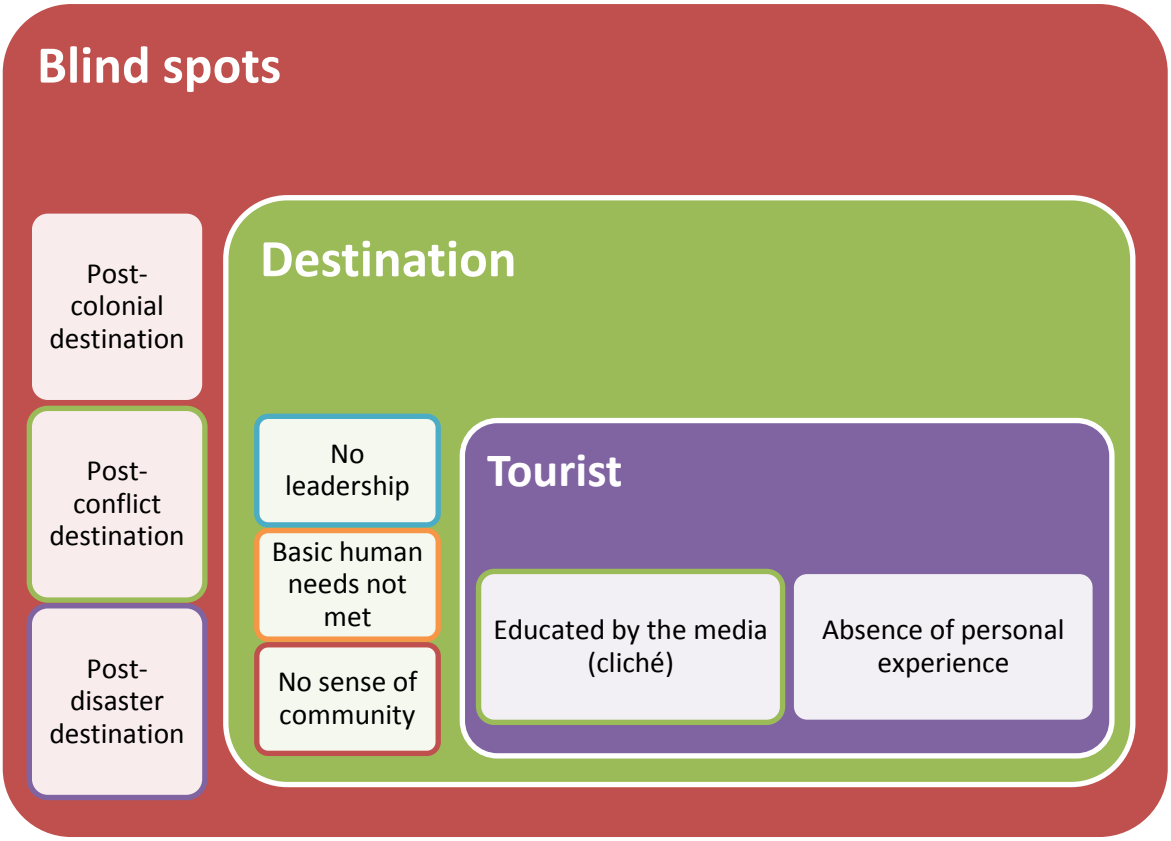


4.4. Applying the Blakeley Model to the Haitian context to identify blind spots from the destinations' and tourists' point of view.

In Haiti the problem of the tourism industry goes beyond tourism management skills (figure 4: Destinations' Blind Spots). It is first of all a human issue that needs to be addressed (the primary needs of the locals need to be met); the human aspect needs to be fixed (a sense of community needs to be developed and the locals need to be able to dream); and finally, Haiti needs visionary leaders (the right context needs to be put in place and the 'yes, we can

spirit' encouraged). It is the improvement of the well-being of Haitians that is going to lead to the improvement of the performance of Haiti as a destination. Subsequently, micro-businesses and SMEs in the industry will have an impact on the national economy. It is a one way relationship. In poor countries like Haiti it is important to address the human condition first. As Dupont (2004) points out, it is the reduction of poverty in Haiti that is going to lead to the development of tourism and not the other way round. As for the tourists, it is important to convey to them knowledge and objectivity about Haiti, in order to develop emotions and feelings toward the destination. All this needs to happen at a pre-visitation stage.

Figure 4: Destinations' Blind Spots



The above figure provides an example of the context which prevents individuals understanding the full reality of their environment and the mental representations of the world. In the present context, ‘blind spots’ refer to the gap between the negative image of the destination perceived by tourists and the optimistic image of the Haitian government. According to Blakeley (2007), these are comfort zones created to resist change and learning in order to preserve existing constructs, emotional orientations and behavior. In the context of Haiti, if the Haitian Government prefers to remain in its comfort zone, the gap between people’s perception of the destination and actual reality may widen. Misleading narratives which have been developed due to lack of experience and ignorance of the destination, can lead to the acceptance of the negative image portrayed by media and word of mouth. As a result, education and learning can play an important role in countering such narratives (Gossling, 2003). Learning only results when people notice new and different cues, or make sense of cues in a way that generates new constructs, beliefs, emotions or behaviour (Blakeley, 2007). In the current context of Haiti, the destination is ‘burying’ its people and the country through ignorance and is not doing much to address the issue.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

5.1. Analysis

According to Cooper & Hall (2008), a marketing strategy is a reflection of activities and tools that destination marketers develop to achieve tourism marketing objectives. For the case of Haiti, as a post-conflict and post disaster tourism destination, the success of its marketing strategy will largely depend on how tourism partners (tourism promoters, residents and government) envision the future of tourism for the country. Haiti has immense possibilities for growth in the tourism sector with its vast historical, cultural and natural assets. As a starting point, the Government of Haiti should outline a road map for tourism.

The next point is that the application of the Blakeley Model (2007) has helped to identify the 'blind spots' that have been impeding tourism growth in Haiti. It has to some extent also indirectly pointed out that entrepreneurship, involving low-cost investment like guest-houses and tour guides (Séraphin, 2013b, 2012) could also be a way to connect locals and visitors. This would be a win-win relationship where the locals would benefit directly from the tourism industry, the visitors get a real experience and both could learn from each other (Michel, 2000). This strategy could be all the more beneficial for the government, particularly if those activities are encouraged in the countryside as they can contribute to releasing pressure on the capital Port-au-Prince, which is

overcrowded and could give a second life to a countryside abandoned by locals (Séraphin, 2013b, 2012)

Based on the weaknesses outlined by the Blakeley Model (2007), it would seem that Haiti's tourism success depends largely on the ability to engage with the locals, re-work its image, differentiate itself effectively by developing new packages and to engage in an aggressive promotional strategy. From evidence gathered throughout the study, it was found that Haiti is enduring a continued prejudice in terms of the negative image it is projecting, despite the effort of the Martelly administration. Existing tourism strategies will have to be reviewed and revamped as these cannot be applied due to the fact that crises and disasters have different impacts and recovery times at different locations. Marketing strategies for Haiti will therefore have to be context-related. While it is beyond the scope of this study to explore and discuss all the marketing strategies that could be adapted for Haiti, this paper chooses to elaborate on a few which are deemed as priorities for the re-launch of the destination. From a broad perspective, Haiti may work upon the following strategies as proposed by Porter (1990):

A. Overall low-cost leadership: Tourism services such as hotel rooms, airline bookings and transportation could be provided at competitive rates compared to competing destinations in the Caribbean (such as the Dominican Republic)

B. Differentiation: Haiti can achieve differentiation through several methods such as: creating new packages, providing a safe environment to tourists, investors improving the legal and judicial system and creating a proper infrastructure to match international standards. In other words the destination needs to 'up its game' (Séraphin, 2014; Théodat, 2004).

C. Focus: The Haitian marketers should focus on the diaspora market segment as they are a more profitable and accessible market than other types of tourists as they (Séraphin & Paul, 2015):

1. Stay in hotels and eat in restaurants
2. Spread the benefits of the tourism industry all over the country as they go back most of the time to their home town/village
3. Use the same facilities as the locals (thus reducing the investment cost)
4. Can be used to test the quality of the service before other types of tourists
5. Invest in the tourism industry
6. Care about the economic and social development of the country

If all the segments of the diaspora are to be considered, the second generation is going to be the main challenge for the Ministry of Tourism. To be convinced, this group needs the following to be provided (Séraphin, 2015b):

a) Evidence that the destination offers quality products and services (advertising, well-trained staff, good transport system, statistics)

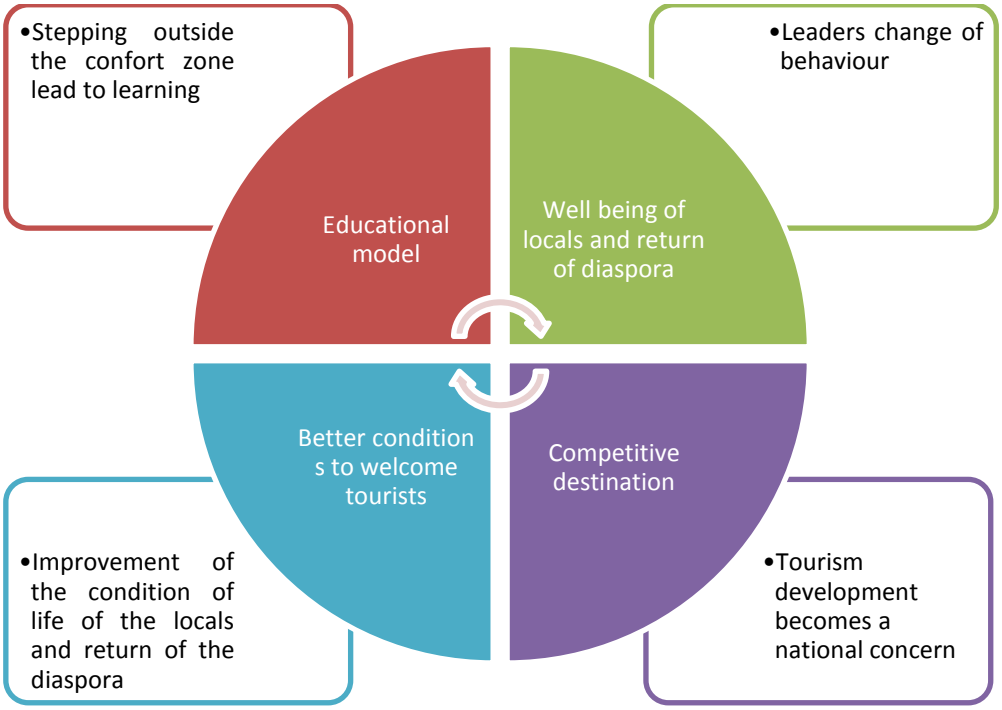
b) Information about tourist sites/landmarks and local events

c) Evidence that the destination has been endorsed by opinion leaders (Investments, comments from media and well-known people who have visited the destination).

D. Educational Model for visitors to Haiti: Dale and Robinson's (2001) 'three domains model of tourism education' argues that in order for a tourism education programme to meet the needs of the industry and stakeholders involved, it needs to: (a) develop interdisciplinary skills for a broad understanding of the industry; (b) provide expertise in a specific area in terms of skills; (c) explore niche markets. These three domains are referred by the authors as a 'body of knowledge'. The tourism authorities in Haiti might perhaps contextualize and apply the Dale and Robinson model while designing their tourism education programmes.

The above marketing strategy is derived from the blind spots theory, as described in the figure below (figure 5):

Figure 5: Recovery Strategy



6. CONCLUSION

This research has offered new insights on the position of tourism in Haiti, as a post-colonial, post-conflict and post-disaster destination. The point of force of this study is that it applies the Blakeley Model and, in so doing, it identifies 'blind spots' that have hindered the progress of Haiti as a tourism destination. The study further proposes that the Haitian government and key tourism stakeholders should engage in a pre-visitation marketing strategy to promote the destination. The Dale and Robinson's (2001) 'three domains model of tourism education' can be utilised as a guideline while designing tourism education programme in Haiti. Because the role of technology in tourist education is

currently little understood, (Neuhofer & Buhalis, 2012), future research might look into testing the effectiveness of an existing Visual Online Learning Material (VOLM) as a marketing tool.

The limitation of the paper is mainly related to the secondary data which was due to the limited number of academic papers and books available on Haiti tourism. In terms of potential, this paper could be used in an action research context by applying our strategy to the Haitian context, then directly observe episodes of stimulus or input and response or output. As Haiti is used as a case study and as an example of a unit of analysis, our methodology could be applied to destinations having a similar profile to Haiti.

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