



The Relationship Between Social Acceptance, Tolerance and Xenophobia in the Tourism Industry

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ABSTRACT

Social acceptance, tolerance and xenophobia are three distinct but interconnected processes within the tourism industry. Social acceptance refers to the attitudes and dynamics in social relations, which are determined by various factors, among them tolerance and xenophobia.

This article explores studies and scientific sources on these concepts, analyzing the connections between them, and their origins. It examines how healthy relationships between tourists and locals, as well as local attitudes, impact tourist satisfaction and the development of the tourism industry. The article discusses research on xenophobic social issues in South Africa, identifying the social consequences and the individuals most affected by irrational societal views.

The article also analyzes the factors that contribute to xenophobia, which hinder business relations in tourism and impede the establishment of welcoming environments. Research on social acceptance conducted in the Adjara region is also presented, with the primary methodology being the analysis of sources and surveys carried out through questionnaires.

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Introduction

Xenophobia and tolerance are two important opposing forces that reflect social consciousness, playing a critical role in shaping communication and relationships. These concepts not only influence how information is exchanged, but also have deep-rooted social and psychological bases, leading to negative consequences within the tourism industry. Xenophobia, defined as the “fear of foreigners”, is typically rooted in stereotypical thinking, fear, and negative attitudes towards foreigners, mostly tourists. It stems from societal constructs, and not from an objective evaluation of people or social groups. According to the Oxford dictionary, a society with a xenophobic mindset perceives its own (locals), “us,” as positive and good, and foreigners as a threat, law breakers, violent people, conquerors, etc. Xenophobia is particularly relevant to the tourism industry because its adverse effects can hinder the sustainable development of tourism and disrupt the healthy functioning of the social institution. Social relations within the tourism and hospitality sector are heavily dependant on the attitudes and perceptions of both parties – locals and tourists – thus making social acceptance and the impact of xenophobia key factors in the industry’s success.

This article explores the concept of xenophobia within various social processes, examining its relationship with social acceptance and the regulation of tolerance. Social acceptance refers to positive and healthy attitudes in interpersonal relationships, while

xenophobia acts as an enemy to such healthy relations. Tolerance, the highest form of acceptance, involves a community, regardless of geographical or native origins, seeing locals welcoming foreigners and embracing their cultural and other differences. Social acceptance encompasses a range of factors, such as ethnic, racial, cultural, political, religious, sexual, and linguistic considerations.

The aim of the study is to determine the relationship between social acceptance, xenophobia, and tolerance. The research objectives are:

- To examine scientific perspectives on xenophobia, tolerance, and social acceptance;
- To analyse the causes and determinants of xenophobia;
- To evaluate the concept of a tolerant society, including awareness and accompanying social relations;
- To establish mechanisms for fostering social acceptance, thus eliminating xenophobia.

Current Xenophobia and The Tourism Industry

In the tourism industry, the attitudes of the host community, residents towards tourists, have an important role in the process of sustainable development, as both xenophobia and tolerance are involved in the process of social acceptance. A tolerant society promotes tourist destinations, while xenophobia hinders the process of one becoming familiar with a place, leading to that place being associated with negative memories and feelings.

Tourists remember tourist destinations not only for their visual beauty, service quality, or pricing, but also for the warmth and hospitality shown by the host community, as well as the emotional experiences they receive during their stay.

A tolerant society is one that can accept a wide range of differences (Crick, 1971; Ryan & Aicken, 2010). Tolerance is often seen as the ability to accept differing views or practices (Sullivan *et al.*, 1979). In the study of xenophobia and civilized society, xenophobia researchers ask one central question: What are the underlying factors that contribute to xenophobia?

Xenophobic attitudes often manifest between locals and foreigners due to social issues, such as competition in the job market. In South Africa, for example, foreign immigrants seeking employment often take positions that, given the shortage of jobs, reduce the employment opportunities for locals. While immigrants may be drawn by the prospect of earning extra income, their presence can provoke negative reactions within the local community (Comins, 2008). Xenophobia is associated with low self-esteem, ignorance, a lack of understanding, and prejudice. Research into the causes of xenophobic attacks in the 2000s reveals a variety of beliefs held by respondents, which contributed to these negative attitudes (in %):

- Foreigners agree to cheap working conditions / take all employment opportunities – 32%
- Foreigners spread crime, theft, violence – 31%

- Uncontrolled number of foreigners in the country – 18%
- Most foreigners own businesses – 16%
- South Africans are too lazy to work – 11%

The researchers also mention the following factors as contributing to xenophobia:

- Absence of political leadership;
- Weakness of communication between communities;
- Weak legal and police governance mechanisms;
- Institutional xenophobic attitudes, policies and practices that reinforce prohibitions on staff legalization within organizations;
- Long-standing xenophobic attitudes, misinformation and mistrust of foreign Africans;
- Extremely high unemployment rates;
- Corruption in state, regulatory, controlling bodies and services;
- Geopolitical stress in several regions;
- Cultural conflicts, and others.

Xenophobia is a growing issue in many countries around the world. In South Africa, for instance, the rate of xenophobic crimes has risen sharply (The publications of the African Center for Migration and Society address a wide range of challenges related to migration and society). According to the latest data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there were 154 reported incidents of xenophobic attacks, resulting in 99 deaths, 1,000 displacements, and various injuries. Within one year, this data escalated to 238 cases, including 7,500 deportations.

To address this issue, the UNHCR has launched several programs that seek to reduce the number of xenophobic incidents, including initiatives focused on peace education – the organization of unifying sports activities, social activities, etc. (Misago *et al.*, 2015).

Xenophobia is intertwined with social acceptance, and its elimination in society requires a complex approach involving education, public awareness raising and social interventions. The causes of society's xenophobic behavior are often rooted in collective consciousness, and often stem from weak legislation, inadequate education, lack of cultural awareness, religious influence, ineffective state regulation, and high crime rates.

Xenophobia also has genetic and psychological foundations, which are manifested against those with foreign ethnic origin, skin color, cultural origin, religious beliefs, and nationality. A xenophobic society tends to perceive its national leaders as superior, which can lead to extreme forms of exclusion and violence. Xenophobia is frequently linked to issues such as genocide, segregation, inhumanity, violence, racism, sexism, ethnocentrism. Other factors causing xenophobia include environmental and congenital factors. The latter includes genetic factors, as reflected in the male fighter hypothesis (McDonald *et al.*, 2012) and the theory of genetic similarity (Rushton, 2005).

According to the theory of prejudice and discriminatory intent, men have historically shown higher levels of inhumanity and xenophobia than women, and they are often

more likely to show ethnocentric attitudes towards others. The intergroup hierarchy hypothesis suggests that men, as representatives of superior groups, tend to take leadership roles within groups, often showing aggression toward external groups to assert their dominance.

The development of xenophobic fears is also linked to an evolutionary disease-avoidance mechanism (Faulkner *et al.*, 2004), according to which the movement of foreigners was historically associated with the spread of viruses and diseases. This led locals to perceive foreigners as a potential threat, fostering feelings of danger (Wagner, 2017).

Social Acceptance and Xenophobia in Georgia

Improving social acceptance and awareness of social relations requires education. It is essential for society to understand the significance of distinguishing between stereotyped and independent perspectives. People need to recognize these differences, which can only be achieved through quality education. Education plays a crucial role in reducing xenophobic and ethnocentric viewpoints (Coenders *et al.*, 2004).

As previously noted, xenophobia can be triggered by various factors, many of which are tied to (lack of) social acceptance. The relationship between the two suggests that the presence of xenophobia simultaneously creates barriers to social acceptance. Without healthy emotional attitudes towards tourists and foreigners, a society cannot fully embrace

social acceptance. Several factors contribute to the aggression and negative attitudes that hinder this process, including:

- The job market and competition;
- Xenophobic threats triggered by the loss of cultural or national values;
- Xenophobic fears caused by the spread of diseases, viruses;
- Xenophobic fears caused by increased market competition and price changes;
- Xenophobic fears caused by the instinct for survival, etc.

Among the factors that shape social acceptance are cultural, ethnic, racist, religious, sexual and political factors, which are closely tied to the intensification of xenophobic fears. This is particularly true for countries that have had or are engaged in political or military confrontations with each other. Carried out from 2019 to 2024, our research on social acceptance in Georgia highlights the role of culture, religion and politics in the dynamics of xenophobia and tolerance. In a study conducted in April 2024, using a questionnaire in the form of interviews with several representatives of travel agencies, it was determined that:

- The attitude of locals towards foreigners, both tourists and temporary residents, is determined by their nationality;
- The attitude of locals towards foreigners, both tourists and temporary residents, is determined by their religious beliefs;
- The attitude of locals towards foreigners, both tourists and temporary res-

idents, is determined by their political position, where the importance of nationality also features.

In a 2019 study in Adjara, hoteliers were characterized by selective attitudes towards tourists based on their origin: if the tourist was an Arab, an Iranian may refuse to serve them; Muslim tourists wearing hijab were also marked as less desirable, inciting a feeling of danger. Such attitudes and xenophobia undermine social acceptance.

Conclusions

Social acceptance plays an important role in tourism relations, impacting tourism businesses, government revenues, the economic growth of the industry, tourist satisfaction and the reputation of tourist destinations.

The trajectory of social acceptance is shaped by the health of its determining factors – social moods and attitudes – including xenophobia and tolerance. These factors are influenced by cultural awareness as well as genetic and natural circumstances.

Overcoming xenophobic fears and biases positively affects tourism relations by enhancing the quality of interactions, strengthening ties, and generating financial and social benefits. It fosters positive attitudes towards local populations, boosts tourist safety and satisfaction, and improves employment indicators, contributing to the multifaceted development of the regions.

To overcome xenophobia between countries that have experienced political disagreements or past conflicts, it is vital to pursue a

policy of reconciliation, which will improve not only relations between the countries, but also reduce the social distance between the populations.

Improving social acceptance requires early-stage education to inform people about its importance. Key points of focus should include: What is social acceptance? What factors influence it? How does it manifest in society? What are the social differences, and how do they impact the tourism industry?

Xenophobia, whether individual or collective, cannot be the responsibility of just one institution. To improve awareness of foreigners and tourists, the following actions are needed:

- **Government and NGO-led Cultural and Social Programs:** These initiatives should promote intensive communication between citizens of different countries, discussion of the problem of xenophobia, in-depth research and presentation of research findings to the public. Providing and explaining information is essential for deepening awareness.
- **Human Rights Protection Programs:** Strengthening social programs that protect the rights of tourists and immigrants. These should highlight the importance of human rights, provide data on discrimination, and present statistics on negative treatment towards these groups.
- **Safety and Security Initiatives:** In order to ensure the safety and security of foreign immigrants through the work of crime fighting agencies and the immigration service, state propaganda

should be active, covered through the mass media, in order to better inform the population, so they better understand that the rights of foreign visitors are protected.

- **Educational and Awareness Programs:** Such training programs, in both non-governmental organizations (whose involvement is necessary) and in secondary and higher educational institutions, should be accompanied through informative meetings with students.
- **International Forums and Conferences:** In order to improve intercultural communications, international forums and conferences should be organized, aimed at improving attitudes and ensuring a safe, welcoming environment for immigrants.

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