

BEHAVIORAL PATTERNS OF MUSLIMS AND CHRISTIANS AT THE 1992 KARMEH FESTIVAL: THE CASE OF LEBANON

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Abstract: In this paper, we investigate the behavioral and socio-demographic profile of individuals attending the 1992 Karmeh arts festival, and explore the perceived impact of the festival on promoting harmony between Muslims and Christians as an alternative to traditional political mechanisms for facilitating peace. The methodology used was intended to be widely applicable for studies of short-term events among Muslims and Christians in the country of Lebanon. Data were collected via personal contacts with a random sample of subjects at the only pedestrian crossing point into the festival. Subjects were identified as either a Muslim or a Christian through their names. A total of 213 subjects were interviewed with 143 (67%) completing follow-up interviews one month after the festival, resulting in a sampling error of plus or minus 8 percent. The attendees' characteristics and their behavioral patterns were determined. Christians and Muslims were found to have similar behavioral patterns. The only statistically significant differences between the two groups were in relation to attending the festival with children, buying jewelry, and listening to the singer Tony. A discussion on special events as a force for peace was presented.

Introduction

Tourism involves interaction between human beings and is a cause of relaxation of travel barriers for the sake of mutual understanding and friendship between ethnic groups and world peace. Tourism is an institution that does not prosper in the absence of peace (Burnett and Muzaffer, 1990). Tourists will think twice before considering a trip to a place where violence is in control, like Lebanon in 1975, where troops were armed and ready for a serious confrontation with each other (Colella, 1987). D'Amore (1988) stated that "tourism is potentially one of the most important vehicles for promoting understanding, trust, and good will among people of the world."

Festival or Hallmark events generally are viewed by their organizers and host communities as being social or cultural celebrations. These events can remove confrontations and barriers between people by bringing a happy relaxed atmosphere and togetherness (Goeldner, 1989).

The country of Lebanon has long been famous for its short term events, which were held in different parts of the

country until the time when civil war broke out in 1975. This study focuses on The Karmeh Festival (started in 1969) which was held sporadically during the war years. Since the end of the worst part of the hostility in 1990, the organizers of the Karmeh Festival started thinking about the possibility of adopting new ways to attract people of different ethnic backgrounds to meet, socialize and get together in a peaceful manner.

This paper discusses the contribution of tourism as an alternative to political approaches to promoting peace in Lebanon. Finding how effective festivals are in promoting peace in a region is the aim of this study. The Karmeh Festival provides an opportunity for Muslims and Christians to interact in a non-threatening and enjoyable situation. As such it has the potential to increase understanding between the two groups. This study looks at the 1992 Karmeh Festival in terms of the following characteristics of these two groups: a) Attendance patterns, b) Group composition, c) Type of crafts bought at the festival and d) Levels of satisfaction with various aspects of the Festival. In addition, the study explores the perceived impact of the festival on providing a setting that is conducive to promoting harmony between Muslims and Christians. It is assumed that if the behavioral patterns are similar between the two groups, the opportunity for interaction is maximized.

Background

Wars and conflicts between Muslims and Christians have been going on since the 16th century. The crusaders trying to conquer the middle east have fought many wars against Muslims. The constant conflicts between the two groups have set the ground for the continuing struggle in Lebanon.

Christians, who account for 43% of the total population, decided to have a separate political entity with the help of an external backer, France, who promised them a political self fulfillment (Europa book, 1993-1994). The Christians failed to be the majority and became one minority in a country of different ethnic minorities. An agreement was reached in 1963 which states that the presidency will be held by a Christian, and the second most important position will be held by a Muslim. Once this compromise was completed, the two communities formed a coalition to underwrite the system, which enabled Lebanon to remain united in the face of internal and external pressures, until 1975. That's when the civil war erupted and lasted until 1990, when president Hrawis' partial implementation of his political plan allowed for political reforms and withdrawal of the various militia from greater Beirut.

Festivals and Hallmark events

Ritchie (1984) has defined hallmark events as follows: "Major one-time or reoccurring events of limited duration, developed primarily to enhance awareness, appeal and profitability of tourist destinations in the short and long term." As for the Karmeh Festival of Arts, it is just one of the many summer festivals that are held in Lebanon. This festival is hosted by the city of Zahleh in the Bekkah Valley in north Lebanon. Attendees come to the festival from around the country of Lebanon and some come from

Syria and Europe. They are either Christians or Muslims, and what contributed to this integration was the stable political climate that Lebanon has been enjoying for more than three years prior to the study.

The atmosphere of celebration and happiness makes people feel relaxed and comfortable with each other, and helps promote trust, and good will (D'Amore, 1988). Festivals events have promoted community cohesion and stimulated tourism (Wall and Mitchell, 1989). Furthermore, facilitating ethnicity or cultural cohesiveness is one of the potential contributions that tourism can make as an agent of political socialization (Ritcher, 1983).

Festivals and tourism as a force for peace

The open-air venues used for festivals encourage a casual and relaxed atmosphere, while the close proximity of performers often results in members of the audience joining in with the dancing, clapping, or singing (Hall and Zeppel, 1990). The common interest of all attendees is sharing and experiencing an authentic culture.

Writing about tourism and peace, Davidson and Montville (1981-1982) suggested that two tracks of diplomacy exist. Track one diplomacy runs through the official channel of communication or the government. This track requires diplomats to make worst case assumptions about an adversary's intentions in order to defend their people's interest. This, no doubt, will lead to distrust. The unofficial channel of people to people relations is noted as track two diplomacy, which includes "unofficial, non-structured interaction. It is always open-minded, often altruistic and strategically optimistic, based on the best case analysis." What track two is stating is that conflict can be resolved or eased by appealing to common human capabilities to respond to good will and reasonableness (Davidson and Montville, 1981-1982).

The operation of tourism is based on track two diplomacy, where information on the different ethnic backgrounds is exchanged directly from one person to another. The political efforts to negotiate peace and cohesiveness among Lebanese have been limited to track one diplomacy and have failed. The main purpose of this study is to show that track two diplomacy has a better chance to succeed than track one.

Methodology

Located in the southwestern part of Asia at the Eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea, Lebanon is about 3 times the size of Rhode Island. Lebanon is bordered by Syria to the north and east, and by Israel to the south. Zahleh is within a 1 hour drive of Beirut, the heart of Lebanon and its capital, and is 2 to 3 hours from most of Lebanon including Tripoli, which is considered the second major city after Beirut. Zahleh has been called the Bride of the Bekkah Valley for a century now. Casinos, theaters, and short-term events are constantly taking place every day in different parts of the city. The Karmeh arts festival is an annual event held in Zahleh, during the 3rd week of August. The 1992 Exhibition was held from Friday, August 21 until Sunday,

August 23. Art work is exhibited and sold on the sidewalk, usually between 11 o'clock in the morning and 8 o'clock in the evening. The performing arts are held between 11 a.m. and midnight. Most of the volunteers involved in this event are college students that help in setting up booths, food services, public relations, parking, security, and clean up after the event.

Attendee profile and instrumentation

People from all over the country (Muslims and Christians) attend the Karmeh Exhibition and most of the attendees are from the Beirut area. In order to obtain information necessary for this study, a research instrument was constructed. The instrument included an on-site interview and a follow-up interview conducted with the prospective attendees a month from the time the on-site interview was conducted. The first interview provides immediate feedback about the current activity (Hyman, 1965). Interviewing is generally the most appropriate method for collecting data because it sets the ground for interviewers to get information through face-to-face interaction (Moser and Kalton, 1974). The interview included questions about attendees' status, party composition, behaviors, and attitudes toward the event and how much an individual plans to spend. One thing to be noted is that it was not appropriate to ask the subjects what religion they are, but it could be figured out from their names.

It is important to look at some variables in order to come up with a socio-demographic profile of an attendee. These variables include: group composition, distance of travel, length of stay, number of visits, purpose of visit, expenditure pattern, and ethnicity. These variables give an idea about how willing the attendees are to attend different places and interact with groups of different backgrounds, setting aside all the hostile feelings for a while and enjoying a relaxed, secure atmosphere. The follow-up questionnaire was done at a later time to get a later reaction and more detailed information about the attendees themselves, what they've done, and how satisfied they were. The questions were the same on the second questionnaire with a minor expansion of questions relating to sex, age, ethnicity, length of stay, and numbers of previous visits. One part of the questionnaire was administered in relation to expenditure patterns, and another part dealt with satisfaction towards the festival and perceptions of the extent to which the festival was a force for peace. The selection of the subjects was as follows: Two members of the research team were positioned on both sides of the only entrance to the festival grounds. They were told to pick every 20th person and interview him or her.

The attendees were selected randomly at the entrance without regard to group size, sex, or the way they dressed. The selected subjects were informed briefly about the study and asked if they a) had participated in the study; and b) were age 18 years or older. If an attendee answered no to the first question and yes to the second, he or she was invited to participate in an interview. If the person did not meet the requirements, no interview was conducted.

The research questions for the study focus on whether there are similarities in the behavioral patterns of Muslims and Christians and whether these similarities will lead to promoting peace between the two groups. Muslims' and Christians' responses were statistically compared using Chi-Square analysis at a level of significance of 0.05.

Results

The total number of on-site interviews was 213, with 143 completing the second part of the survey. A number of respondents lived outside the country (70 subjects) and could not take part in the follow-up personal interviews. The tables and figures shown in this paper give some highlights about the significance of some of the variables and what they meant.

The number of Christians sampled at the festival was 57 (39%) and the number of Muslims was 86 (61%) out of the total of 143 participants who completed the interviews. The portion of Christians in the sample was lower because of the bigger and more dominating Muslim population. The majority of attendees were with spouses or children, and relatively few (13-21%) attended alone. One significant difference that was observed was that 67% of Muslim attendees attended with children, versus 51% for Christians (table 1).

Table 1. Group composition of Christians and Muslims attending the Karmeh Arts Festival.

Type of Group	Christians (n=57)	Muslims (n=86)	Chi Square
Alone	21%	13%	1.7
With Spouse	58%	71%	2.6
With Children	51%	67%	3.9*
With Friends	40%	35%	0.4
With Relatives	33%	40%	0.6
With Anybody Else	5%	7%	0.2

* Significant at the .05 level.

Festival visitors purchased a variety of types of arts and crafts, with the vast majority of both Muslims (93%) and Christians (90%) reporting some purchase. There were no significant differences between Muslims and Christians as far as buying goods from the stands, except for buying jewelry. Muslims (63%) were more likely than Christians (44%) to purchase jewelry at the festival (Table 2).

Table 2. Percentage of Christians and Muslims making various types of purchases at the Karmeh Arts Festival.

Type of Purchase	Christians (n=57)	Muslims (n=86)	Chi Square
Crafts	46%	44%	0.0
Jewelry	44%	63%	5.0*
Painting	33%	23%	1.8
Wooden crafts	32%	29%	0.1
Photographs	30%	22%	1.1
Glass	46%	57%	1.8
Pottery	19%	14%	0.7
Leather	33%	37%	0.2
Antiques	63%	65%	0.1
Folkclothes	21%	22%	0.10

* Significant at the .05 level.

The majority of festival attendees attended some musical performances (Table 3). It is interesting to note that Muslims were more likely (43% versus only 25% of Christians) to attend the concert by the singer, Tony, who is a Christian.

Table 3. Percentage of Christians and Muslims listening to various performers at the Karmeh Arts Festival.

Performer	Christians (n=57)	Muslims (n=86)	Chi Square
Attended Concerts	86%	92%	1.3
Majidah	75%	72%	0.2
Rabih	68%	63%	0.5
Sabah	63%	52%	1.6
Tony	25%	43%	5.1*
Diab	53%	48%	0.3
Fatouh	35%	48%	2.2

* Significant at the .05 level.

Other than these significant differences, there were many similarities in habits for both groups. For example, attending the festival was the primary reason for visiting the area among both Muslims (69%) and Christians (67%). The majority of subjects have attended the festival more than once (table 4), which leads to the conclusion that festivals have strong potential in attracting and encouraging people to attend and interact.

Table 4. Number of previous visits to the Karmeh Arts Festival.

Number of Visits	Christians (n=57)	Muslims (n=86)
One time	42%	44%
Two times	48%	46%
Three times	3%	5%
Four or more times	7%	5%

Chi square = .06 (not significant)

Most festival visitors reported that they felt the festival had some effect in promoting better relationships between Christians and Muslims, although the majority felt the amount of influence was "very little" (Table 5). About 40% of both Muslims and Christians felt that the amount of influence was "somewhat" to "a significant amount." Again, the differences between Christians and Muslims were not significant.

Table 5. Visitors' perceptions of the extent to which the Karmeh Arts Festival helps promote better relationships between Christians and Muslims.

Influence of Festival	Christians(n=57)	Muslims(n=86)
Not at all	4%	4%
Very little	56%	59%
Somewhat	39%	26%
A significant amount	2%	12%

Chi square = 6.3 (not significant)

Conclusion

Results of this study showed that the festival was not only an event that brought people of different ethnic backgrounds together, but also served as an attractive

profitable event for local residents. Generalization of the behavioral patterns of this study could be made with caution to most festivals and Hallmark events in the country.

The contribution of tourism or hallmark events to facilitating ethnic cohesiveness has had a large impact on the Lebanese community in general. The war, anger, and hostile feelings seemed to be put aside at the Karmeh festival, and Lebanese people seemed to be brought closer through understanding environments and heritage. Although results confirmed that a single festival probably would not have a large effect in reducing hostilities or promoting peace, the combined effects of festivals throughout the country and over a period of years may yield considerably more potential as a force for peace.

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