
The Contribution of Maximiliano E. Korstanje to Tourism and Terrorism Studies (Part I)

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Abstract

This paper examines the contributions of Maximiliano E. Korstanje to the interdisciplinary fields of tourism and terrorism studies. It explores his critical interpretation of tourism as a social institution shaped by capitalism, globalization, hospitality, and risk, rather than merely an economic activity. Particular attention is given to his analyses of terrorism, fear, and tourism security, emphasizing the role of perceived risk and media narratives in shaping tourist behavior. The paper also discusses Korstanje's critique of resilience and the transformation of hospitality under conditions of insecurity. Finally, it assesses the significance and influence of his work within contemporary tourism, security, and social science scholarship.

Key Words: Terrorism, Risk Perception, Maximiliano Korstanje, Safety Security in Tourism

Introduction

Over the last two decades, the interdisciplinary fields of tourism studies, risk research, and terrorism studies have increasingly converged. The growth of international tourism, the emergence of global terrorism after the attacks of September 11, 2001, and the expansion of crises such as pandemics and political violence have encouraged scholars to investigate the relationship between mobility, security, and modern society. Among the academics contributing to this dialogue, Maximiliano E. Korstanje has emerged as one of the most prolific and controversial scholars. His extensive body of work spans tourism sociology,

¹ The content of this paper was generated by AI ChatGPT, and curated by the editor of the journal, Prof. Maximiliano E. Korstanje.

anthropology, disaster studies, hospitality, political economy, terrorism, and mobilities. Through hundreds of journal articles and dozens of books, Korstanje has attempted to explain how tourism functions not merely as an economic activity but as a social institution deeply embedded within systems of power, capitalism, fear, and globalization. Unlike many tourism researchers who concentrate primarily on destination management or marketing, Korstanje approaches tourism from a critical sociological perspective. Drawing inspiration from classical social theorists such as Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, Thorstein Veblen, Sigmund Freud, and Norbert Elias, he argues that tourism reflects broader social structures and historical transformations rather than simply individual consumer choices (Korstanje, 2010; 2017). His scholarship seeks to explain why tourism became central to modern capitalism, how hospitality is transformed under conditions of insecurity, and why terrorism exerts such a profound influence on tourist behavior. Perhaps his most significant contribution lies in connecting tourism with terrorism through theories of risk perception, social fear, and the decline of hospitality in contemporary Western societies. Rather than viewing terrorism solely as isolated acts of political violence, Korstanje interprets it as a symbolic process that reshapes mobility, state power, media discourse, and public consciousness. This interdisciplinary perspective has distinguished his work from mainstream tourism security literature and generated substantial scholarly discussion. This essay examines Korstanje's principal contributions to tourism and terrorism studies. It evaluates his theoretical frameworks, analyses his influence on tourism security research, discusses criticisms of his work, and considers his broader impact on interdisciplinary social science.

Academic Background

Maximiliano E. Korstanje is an Argentine sociologist and anthropologist whose academic work has developed across several disciplines. Trained in sociology, he has taught and researched subjects including tourism, anthropology, disaster management, political economy, and hospitality. His publication record is exceptionally extensive, including numerous books, edited volumes, and peer-reviewed journal articles published by major academic presses such as Springer, Emerald, Routledge, and Palgrave Macmillan. One distinguishing characteristic of Korstanje's scholarship is its interdisciplinary methodology. Rather than limiting himself to tourism management, he integrates sociology, philosophy, psychology, anthropology, economics, political science, and history. This broad intellectual framework allows him to

interpret tourism as a social phenomenon shaped by historical forces including colonialism, capitalism, technological development, and globalization. His work frequently revisits classical social theory. Durkheim's concept of social solidarity, Marx's critique of capitalism, Weber's rationalization thesis, and Freud's theories of anxiety all appear throughout his publications. These theoretical foundations distinguish his writing from conventional tourism research, which often emphasizes quantitative models of tourist behavior or destination competitiveness (Korstanje, 2018).

Tourism as a Social Institution

One of Korstanje's most important theoretical contributions is his argument that tourism should be understood as a social institution rather than merely an economic sector. Traditional tourism literature often defines tourism in operational terms: the temporary movement of people outside their normal place of residence for leisure or business. While useful for statistical purposes, Korstanje argues that such definitions overlook tourism's deeper social meaning.

Instead, tourism performs several important social functions:

- reinforcing national identity;
- reproducing social hierarchies;
- legitimizing consumer capitalism;
- symbolizing freedom and mobility;
- creating distinctions between hosts and guests.

According to Korstanje, tourism emerged alongside industrial capitalism as paid holidays, improved transportation, and rising disposable incomes allowed larger segments of society to travel. Consequently, tourism reflects the economic organization of modern societies rather than existing independently of them (Korstanje, 2017a; 2017b). This interpretation places tourism alongside institutions such as education, religion, and the family. Like these institutions, tourism transmits values, norms, and ideologies while simultaneously generating economic value.

Hospitality Beyond Commercial Exchange

Hospitality represents another central concept in Korstanje's scholarship. Much tourism research views hospitality as customer service provided by hotels, restaurants, airlines, or destinations. Korstanje argues that this commercial interpretation misses hospitality's historical and anthropological significance. Drawing upon philosophers such as Jacques Derrida and anthropologists including Marcel Mauss, Korstanje conceptualizes hospitality as a moral obligation governing relationships between strangers. Historically, hospitality reduced conflict by allowing travelers safe passage through unfamiliar territories. Ancient societies developed customs requiring hosts to protect guests, thereby facilitating trade, diplomacy, and cultural exchange. However, Korstanje argues that contemporary Western societies increasingly replace genuine hospitality with commercial transactions. Hotels, airports, and tourist destinations provide standardized services mediated by contracts, surveillance technologies, and legal regulations rather than interpersonal trust. This transformation has profound implications for tourism because hospitality becomes conditional upon security assessments instead of moral reciprocity (Korstanje, 2017a; 2017b).

Tourism, Risk, and Security

Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, tourism researchers devoted increasing attention to security issues. Korstanje became one of the leading voices arguing that tourism security cannot be explained solely through crime statistics or terrorist incidents. Instead, tourists respond primarily to perceived risk.

Perceived risk differs from objective danger. A destination may statistically be quite safe while still appearing dangerous because of extensive media coverage, political rhetoric, or symbolic associations with terrorism.

Korstanje argues that risk perception depends upon several interacting factors:

- media representation;
- historical memory;
- cultural narratives;
- government communication;
- individual psychological experience.

These variables explain why tourism demand often declines dramatically after highly publicized attacks even when the probability of becoming a victim remains extremely low (Korstanje, 2020).

His work therefore bridges tourism psychology with sociology by emphasizing that fear is socially constructed rather than purely individual.

Terrorism as Symbolic Communication

Perhaps Korstanje's best-known contribution concerns the symbolic nature of terrorism. Conventional terrorism research frequently defines terrorism as politically motivated violence intended to intimidate governments or civilian populations. Korstanje accepts this definition but argues that terrorism operates primarily through symbolism. According to his interpretation, terrorists rarely possess sufficient military capability to defeat states directly. Instead, their effectiveness depends upon generating fear disproportionate to their actual physical capacity. Media amplification becomes central to this process. Television broadcasts, social media, newspapers, and digital communication repeatedly circulate images of destruction, transforming isolated incidents into global spectacles. Tourism becomes especially vulnerable because travel depends heavily upon perceptions of safety, predictability, and trust. Thus terrorism attacks not only human lives but also systems of mobility. Airports, airlines, hotels, cruise ships, museums, festivals, and tourist attractions become symbolic targets because they represent globalization, international cooperation, and economic openness (Korstanje, 2018).

The End of Hospitality

Among Korstanje's most influential books is *Terrorism, Tourism and the End of Hospitality* in the 'West'. In this work, he develops the provocative thesis that Western societies are gradually abandoning traditional principles of hospitality in response to increasing fears surrounding terrorism, migration, and global insecurity.

According to Korstanje, several developments illustrate this transformation:

- intensified border controls;
- biometric surveillance;

- airport security expansion;
- immigration restrictions;
- increased monitoring of travelers;
- securitization of public spaces.

These measures undoubtedly improve certain aspects of public safety. However, Korstanje argues that they also alter the meaning of hospitality itself. Guests increasingly become potential threats requiring surveillance before receiving welcome. Tourism consequently evolves from an experience based upon openness toward strangers into one mediated by suspicion and risk management (Korstanje, 2017). This argument extends beyond tourism into broader debates concerning globalization, migration, and citizenship.

Fear as a Social Product

Fear occupies a central place in Korstanje's theoretical framework. Rather than treating fear as an instinctive emotional response, he conceptualizes it as socially produced through institutions including governments, media organizations, educational systems, and political discourse. This perspective draws upon Ulrich Beck's "risk society" thesis while extending it into tourism. According to Korstanje, modern societies increasingly organize themselves around anticipation of future disasters rather than responses to present dangers. Tourists therefore consume security alongside travel experiences. Insurance policies, travel advisories, airport screening, emergency planning, and destination branding all become components of the tourism product itself. This interpretation broadens tourism security beyond physical protection to include psychological reassurance. Consequently, destination managers must address both actual safety and perceived safety.

Critique of Tourism Resilience

Another notable aspect of Korstanje's scholarship concerns his criticism of the increasingly popular concept of resilience. Many tourism scholars argue that destinations recover from disasters through resilience strategies emphasizing adaptation, flexibility, and innovation. Korstanje questions whether resilience has become an ideological concept that obscures structural inequalities.

He argues that celebrating resilience sometimes shifts responsibility away from governments and institutions onto individuals and local communities. For example, encouraging destinations simply to "be resilient" after terrorist attacks may overlook deeper political, economic, or historical causes of insecurity. This critical perspective has stimulated important debates within disaster and tourism research concerning the political implications of resilience discourse.

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