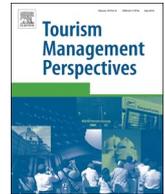




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Symbiotic relationship or not? Understanding resilience and crisis management in tourism

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A B S T R A C T

This opinion piece argues the need for researchers to shift to resilience rather than crisis management research in tourism studies. While the two concepts are inherently linked, existing studies prioritize the latter rather than the former. Also, a strong focus on disasters as the backdrop for resilience research in tourism is highlighted. I argue that both fast and slow paced changes that impact the tourism system and conceptual issues with respect to concepts such as destination resilience must be studied. I highlight several gaps in the tourism literature on resilience and offer avenues for further research. Specifically, the need for research on destination resilience, psychological resilience, employee resilience and organizational resilience is emphasized.

The unprecedented rise in the number of disasters and crises affecting the tourism industry worldwide has brought forth the importance of resilience building in the tourism industry. While tourism researchers are devoting much attention to crisis management, it is perhaps now the opportune time to question the relationship between crisis and disaster management, and resilience. Inherently crises are different from disasters with the latter implying a situation where there is severe loss of life and long-term damage to the society (Boin & McConnell, 2007; Hall, 2010). As such, the scale of an event, its character, and the vulnerability of a system prior to an event are important issues that must remain at the forefront of any resilience or crisis management thinking in tourism studies. There is a tendency for researchers to view crisis management as a holistic process involving prevention, planning, response, recovery and learning. These phases are not static and clearly identifiable as implied (Boin & McConnell, 2007). Far too often, the plans do not work, the recovery takes longer than anticipated, and the learning for individuals, organizations and communities is minimal. This does not mean that planning and processes put in place by organizations, communities and destinations as part of crisis management are not useful. To the contrary, there is still much to learn from crisis management given the well documented cases of how crises have been dealt with effectively because of roles and responsibilities were clearly allocated, evacuation plans were spot on, and resources were deployed effectively etc. The argument I am making in this opinion piece is that crisis and disaster management is necessary but not sufficient for advancing knowledge on how communities, organizations and destinations plan for, cope with, and recover from events that are increasingly larger in magnitude and having

significantly more profound socio-economic and environmental impacts on individuals and societies. By ‘events’ I mean disasters rather than crises but as will be argued later, it is important to emphasize that resilience is not necessarily linked to only disasters and crises, and has a much wider application.

Resilience is a term that finds its meaning in relation to change (Hall, Prayag, & Amore, 2018) which can be extraordinary or incremental and cumulative while crisis management is often linked to change that result from extraordinary circumstances. One of the great difficulties in understanding and responding to change is the rate at which change occurs (Hall et al., 2018). Individuals, organizations and communities have to deal with both incremental and sudden change. Therefore, ideas of resilience are related not only to change but also to stability and response (Holling, 1973). In contrast to crisis management, resilience thinking advocates that systems (e.g., ecological, socio-ecological etc.) have the capacity to adapt, respond and evolve as a result of both extraordinary circumstances but also incremental changes (Lew, 2014). In this way, resilience thinking offers a complementary, if not better, perspective than crisis management to understand how systems cope with any scale of adversity. From an ecological perspective, resilience is defined by characteristics such as a system's ability to withstand a disturbance while maintaining its basic functions, the ability to self-organize, and the ability to learn and adapt (Holling, 1973), which is not substantially different from what crisis management literature has been advocating. However, one important point of distinction is that, from a resilience perspective, the system has the ability to self-organize while this is not necessarily the case in crisis management thinking. For a socio-ecological system (e.g., destination),

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this implies that reorganization is endogenous rather than simply being forced by external drivers. Self-organization is enhanced by coevolved ecosystem components and the presence of social networks that facilitate innovative problem solving (Carpenter, Walker, Anderies, & Abel, 2001).

From papers identified in the Scopus database, Hall et al. (2018) note that the dominant scales of analysis for resilience are by far those of communities and regions (see also Bec, McLennan, & Moyle, 2016). Resilience research in tourism focuses mainly on major disasters and crises (Lew, 2014; Orchiston, 2013). As such, the application of resilience thinking in tourism remains in its infancy (Becken, 2013; Biggs, Hall, & Stoeckl, 2012; Hall et al., 2018). Existing studies prioritize system level, for example, as part of a response to climate change (Becken, 2013), but also vulnerability of the tourism system due to external factors such as terrorism, floods, and economic fluctuations. The lack of studies and the focus on disasters indicate tourism researchers' priorities with respect to resilience thinking so far. An emergent research strand examines linkages between sustainability and resilience (Espiner, Orchiston, & Higham, 2017). A starting point, for further research is to ask: What is resilience in the first place? What does it mean for tourism studies? There is no agreement among researchers in different fields on whether resilience is a process or an outcome; What types of resilience matters in tourism (economic, psychological, organizational, financial and infrastructural)?; What is the goal(s) of resilience building for individuals, communities, organizations and destinations? Different interpretations of resilience have implications for not only how the tourism system is understood but also how they are designed, managed and governed.

This brings me to an assumption that seems to imbue much of the existing resilience thinking in tourism studies. Researchers seem to assume that the characteristics of socio-ecological systems (e.g., ability to reorganize, learn and adapt, vulnerability etc.) are applicable to the tourism system and that resilience of the tourism system can be built by understanding such specificities. This may not be the case given the nature of the characteristics of the tourism system itself, and its vulnerabilities, rate of change, coping mechanisms, and adaptation, among others. As such from a theoretical perspective, there is a need to identify which of these issues are more salient when researching the resilience of the tourism system. As pointed out by Adger (2000), a simple re-application of ecological resilience concepts to study socio-ecological systems leads to normative and conceptual difficulties. For example, it remains unclear in the tourism literature how destination resilience should be conceptualised and whether community resilience feeds into destination resilience or vice-versa? To what extent crisis and disaster management builds the resilience of the system? There are far more questions than answers as pointed out by Hall et al. (2018).

While numerous examples exist to show that the tourism system (e.g., Thailand after the 2004 Tsunami, Christchurch after the 2010 and 2011 Canterbury Earthquakes) has the ability to withstand disturbances, there are equally numerous examples of communities and destinations that struggle with the ability to self-organize, learn and adapt after a disaster. Adaptation and transformation processes to changing environmental, social and economic conditions require initiatives by various tourism actors with different functions in the tourism system, and on different scales of governance, to be able to assess, plan and manage resilience over time (Luthe & Wyss, 2014). These complexities have yet to be understood and researched adequately in the tourism literature. A concept such as destination resilience is fraught with conceptual difficulties given that destinations in themselves are difficult to define and the resilience of a destination is often a matter of the resilience of its constituents such as tourism dependent communities, organizations and other stakeholders (Hall et al., 2018). Beyond macro studies on the resilience of the tourism system as well as conceptual work that defines destination resilience, for example, in the next section, I offer some priorities for resilience research in the tourism field.

Previous research has observed that there is little direct analysis of the resilience of individuals, whether as tourists, community members or entrepreneurs (Biggs et al., 2012; Hall et al., 2018; Lew, 2014). Extending these studies, researchers should question how resilience can be built by engaging various tourism stakeholders and the driving factors, as well as the conflicts that emanate from resilience building activities. To my mind, issues of social capital, their relationships with the resilience of communities should be given due attention. Several studies argue, for example, that the intensity, type, and governance in tourism destination networks contribute to destination resilience (Hall et al., 2018). Given that social capital is an outcome of relationships and networks among members of a community, it is perhaps time to investigate both conceptually and empirically these linkages between resilience building activities and social capital. The latter can be conceptualised at the individual, firm and community levels. An extension of such studies would also include how resilience building activities contribute to community well-being and quality of life. As we all know, disasters can have profound impacts on community well-being but at the moment linkages with resilience have not been adequately investigated.

Relatedly, the psychology literature abounds of studies examining the psychological resilience of individuals in the face of adversity and ordinary circumstances. The notion of psychological resilience has yet to be embraced in both the tourism resilience and crisis management literatures. From a positive psychology perspective, resilience is an individual asset that can be developed and, therefore, managed. Positive thinking is considered as part and parcel of building psychological resilience, with individuals engaging in such practices being more resilient than others. No doubt that psychological resilience is an outcome of a complex multiscale individual level system dynamic that comprises introspection, social interactions, positive adaptation, emotions, and gene-environment interplay, among others. As tourism researchers, we have yet to understand how individuals in their role as tourists use psychological resilience when faced with adversity at the destination. Psychological resilience is also of relevance to tourism entrepreneurs, given that previous studies suggest that the ability of entrepreneurial ventures to bounce back from crises and disasters depends very much on the resilience of the entrepreneur. Hence, how tourism entrepreneurs use psychological resilience to cope with incremental change and bounce back from disasters is an area that needs much attention to further our understanding of the person-business resilience interface. Different conceptualisations and operationalisations of psychological resilience exist and researchers have to choose wisely which school of thought they adhere to and for what reasons. Several other questions (when are tourists resilient? what shows tourists are resilient? what circumstances attenuate their resilience?) remain to be answered.

In addition, as Lew (2014) suggested, new frameworks that encompass slow change variables rather than a sole focus on rapid change through crises and disasters would provide a more comprehensive view of resilience. Frameworks that clearly articulate the interface between crisis management plans and resilience at the destination level are needed. As argued by Boin and McConnell (2007), the traditional ways to crisis preparation and response may not suffice in the case of catastrophic events, whereby the effective response for a community will be much dependent on the adaptive behaviours of citizens, local authorities, rescue workers, and organizations, among others. Here in lies the importance of shifting the academic debate to resilience building activities of individuals, organizations, communities and destinations. No matter how comprehensive and robust crisis and disaster management plans are, events such as hurricanes Katrina and Irma have shown that these plans are not enough to mitigate the negative impacts. A question that begs attention is, therefore, how resilience building plans fit into the broader business continuity plans of tourism businesses, communities, and action plans of local government, and which factors make such plans work or not. Unlike crisis management literature, there is

currently insufficient evidence from the tourism literature as well as the broader disaster management literature on the effectiveness of resilience building activities on business survival and performance and community recovery after disasters. Not only the extraordinary (rapid change) circumstances that enhance or attenuate the resilience of tourism entrepreneurs, organizations and communities must be investigated but also the incremental changes.

The broader disaster management literature suggest that resilient organizations are less likely to fail, have fewer negative impacts of disasters, and recover more quickly compared to more vulnerable organizations (Hall, Malinen, Vosslander, & Wordworth, 2016). While some studies have examined the resilience of tourism organizations (Orchiston, Prayag, & Brown, 2016), there is no consensus yet on how best to conceptualise and operationalise the concept. Organizational resilience can be defined as the ability to withstand disturbances and seize opportunities from the changed environment (Smit & Wandel, 2006). The literature suggests that a distinction must be made between planned and adaptive resilience (Lee, Vargo, & Seville, 2013). While the former relates to the organization's use of existing planning capabilities, which are essentially pre-disaster activities, the latter refers to how the organization responds to emergent situations that are not part of the plans (Lee et al., 2013). Despite conceptualizations of organizational resilience drawing from ideas of adaptive capacity and vulnerability from the ecological system literature, the notion of self-organization has yet to be taken on board in this line of research (Hall et al., 2018). Existing studies have mainly examined the resilience of small businesses (Biggs et al., 2012; Orchiston et al., 2016) and the need to investigate the resilience of different types of tourism organizations (micro, small and large) as well sector based differences (tourism vs. manufacturing), including sub sector differences (e.g., accommodation vs. tourist attractions) is omnipresent. The study of organizational resilience is important not only in terms of lost revenue for businesses but also in terms of the damage to services, local communities, supply chain capacity and business capability. Arguably, resilient organizations contribute to resilient communities.

Related to organization resilience, the literature suggests that organizations that are capable of building and developing a resilient workforce will be more adaptive and successful (Hall et al., 2016). Yet, the tourism and the Human Resources (HR) literatures remain thin on the notion of employee resilience. While much has been written on psychological resilience in the context of the work place, studies have argued that employee resilience is different from psychological resilience (Näswall, Kuntz, Hodliffe, & Malinen, 2013). The former refers to the capacity of employees, facilitated and supported by the organization, to utilise resources to positively cope, adapt and thrive in response to changing work circumstances. This definition implies that a resilient individual would not necessarily be a resilient employee (Näswall et al., 2013). Through HR interventions such as education, training and development, employees can develop skills and behaviours that allow them to cope with both sudden and incremental changes in the workplace. The interface between psychological resilience, employee resilience and organizational resilience has not been researched adequately to conclusively suggest that individuals who are resilient are also resilient employees and these traits or behaviours contribute to organizational resilience. Likewise, the dynamics between employee resilience and tourist interactions have not been investigated.

In conclusion, though I make a case for a shift towards resilience building rather than crisis management as the focus of future research in the tourism field, one cannot live without the other. The ability for individuals, organizations, communities, and destinations to manage

and successfully recover from repeated crises and disasters, shows properties of being resilient. My argument in favour of resilience research in tourism is based on the premise that if a system is resilient, it is implicit that it has the ability not only to overcome crises and disasters but to better adapt to change overall. By highlighting, several areas of research such as psychological resilience, organizational resilience, destination resilience and employee resilience, I am also aware that other areas such as financial resilience and infrastructural resilience also need attention. The road ahead is full of research opportunities and multi-disciplinary teams will be better equipped at investigating this highly complex phenomenon of resilience.

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