

## **A media place approach to resilience in tourism studies**

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Sustainable development has been in focus ever since the publication of *Our Common Future* in 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development. Sustainability agendas have been adopted by actors in the tourism system at all levels. Furthermore, a range of articles and books have been written on its application to tourism, disregarding the fact that tourism can never be fully sustainable due to its reliance upon travel (Butler, 2017, p. 3). This paper contributes to research on sustainable tourism development by advancing a resilience perspective adapted to current challenges in tourism practice. There are clear connections between sustainability and resilience as both concepts deal with change. Sustainability commonly deals with change based on conservation, while resilience deals with change based on adaptation and transformation (Lew et al., 2017).

Contemporary research on resilience generally builds on Holling's (1973) seminal paper in which he introduces resilience in ecological systems to explore the resistance of natural systems to disturbances of natural or anthropogenic causes. Since the 1970s resilience has been adopted by a number of subjects and disciplines (Folke, 2004), and more recently tourism studies. Given the wide application of the concept to several disciplines, there exists a plethora of definitions and applications of resilience thought. Several definitions focus on the ability to adapt and deal effectively with change (Luthe & Romano, 2014) which also provides a useful departure point for this article.

Within the field of tourism, most studies on resilience consist of applications to different cases (Butler, 2017) in which system theory provides the overarching approach, or a heuristic or metaphor to explore resilience in different contexts (c.f. Berbés-Blázquez & Scott, 2017). System theory and specifically the socio-ecological system theory approach is a common theoretical departure point to resilience in a multitude of subjects, and dominates resilience thought today (Colding & Barthel, 2019). The theoretical approach has consequences for the conceptualisation of resilience, and sets limits to the analyses and usability. The boundaries of resilience though have lately received some criticism. Resilience fails to take account of politics and power relations, and it overlooks conflicts over resources, and the importance of power asymmetries (Brown, 2014, p. 109). There has therefore been a general call for theory development within resilience studies (Brown, 2021), but also within tourism studies (Lew 2013; Lew et al., 2017). In response to the call for theory development on resilience theory, the authors of this article argue that there is a need to address partnership fields or rather an interdisciplinary approach to expand the knowledge. This is in line with Darbellay (2019) who argue that interdisciplinary approaches are needed in order to address complex societal issues. While other researchers argue for a postdisciplinary approach in order to tackle global problems (cf. Munar, Pernecky & Feighery, 2016; Pernecky, Munar & Feighery, 2016). Coles, Hall and Duval (2016) argue therefore that the problem needs to be in focus and the knowledge (disciplines) relevant for the problem is more flexibly applied. As a new approach to advance the knowledge of resilience in a tourism context, this paper proposes to apply theories derived from media studies.

Thus, the purpose of this conceptual paper is twofold: to discuss the ontological underpinnings of resilience in tourism studies from an interdisciplinary approach, and to argue for a media place approach to resilience that explores both the constitution of resilience in tourism places and how resilience is molded by the politics of media practices.

Media studies have so far had scattered contributions to tourism studies as argued by Månsson et al. (2020). Tourism research rarely connects to theory development in media studies and vice versa since they advance in different arenas. In line with Månsson et al. (2020) and Waade

(2020), we claim that media studies have more to offer to tourism studies. By applying theories of mediatization and geographies of communication - a subfield within media studies - to the developing corpus of resilience in tourism studies, this conceptual paper highlights the value of a media studies approach to the conceptualization of resilience of tourism places. From an interdisciplinary standpoint, these theories are used to showcase the interconnectedness of media, place and resilience which the dominant social ecological system approach to resilience in tourism has failed to incorporate into its corpus.

This paper follows Jaakkola's (2020) advice on the design of conceptual articles in which the order and role of argument, concepts, and theories are essential. The research design of this paper applies theory adaptation as an approach to revising established knowledge by introducing supplementary theories as frames in the conceptualization (cf. Jaakkola, 2020). In this paper, we turn to media studies to show the need for an interdisciplinary approach to tackle complex current issues.

By adopting an interdisciplinary approach this paper develops a broadened discussion about resilience in tourism studies as the established approach does not give enough understanding of the interconnectedness of media, place and resilience. Firstly, research on resilience and specifically resilience in tourism are firstly presented as a focal theory of the paper. Given the popularity of resilience in several disciplines, the presentation is based on a broad range of journals with different disciplinary backgrounds. Studies on resilience and tourism were collected to illustrate central conceptualisations in key journals in the field of tourism as *Annals of Tourism Research*, *Tourism Management* and *Contemporary issues in Tourism*.

Secondly, a media place approach to resilience, based on theories of mediatization and geography of communication, is presented as these theories offer a supplementary approach to resilience in tourism places. The theories were chosen due to their ability to address the observed weakness in the conceptualisation of resilience in tourism. In one sense, the proposed approach also provides a critique of mainstream conceptualisation of resilience based on a natural sciences approach. Hence the proposed media place approach offers an interdisciplinary social science approach to resilience.

Thirdly, even though this research is conceptual, the approach is illustrated with data collected in Mediarkivet, the largest digital news media archive in Scandinavia, during the covid-19 pandemic. For the purpose of illustrating the established natural sciences and media place approaches, the data is presented as counter narratives to visualize differences.

The paper concludes that the dominating socio-ecological system approach to resilience in tourism studies, assumes an ontology of a system constituted as a subject with clear boundaries. Even if a system has interactions, relations and dependencies, it is delineated by its spatial and temporal boundaries. Whereas the proposed media place approach follows changes and dependencies between mediatization of tourism places and changes in the overall understanding of resilience of tourism places. The role of mediatization and its significance for changes in places are put at the centre of the analysis. Additionally, the approach assumes that a tourist place is constituted as a verb that is constantly created and recreated in a process.

The media place approach is a response to the general call for theory development within resilience studies and more specifically within tourism studies (cf. Brown, 2014; Lew 2013; Lew et al., 2017). The approach showcases the advantages of conceptualising resilience in tourism studies in a larger mediatized context that follows changes in the world over time.

Hence, the paper concludes that resilience in places must also be conceptualised ontologically as a fluid concept that evolves over time. To understand sudden and long term changes in tourism place resilience, special attention must be given to nodes or flows of information that connect the media systems and constitute places. These information flows provide insights into the resilience of places as they evolve and not just when they are in unbalance. Consequently, a media place perspective highlights the different reasons that are part of triggering the unbalance addressed in the socio-ecological system approach.

The proposed interdisciplinary approach formed on theories belonging to partnership fields bring new answers to complex questions that can not be solved from a single disciplinary perspective. However, this does not dismiss the common general socio-ecological approach to tourism resilience. Different approaches to resilience provide complementary perspectives that contribute with different understandings to resilience in tourism studies. The authors of this paper, therefore, agree with Brown (2021) that argues that resilience in the social-ecological system relates both to interactions in a broad sense as well as resilience as a process. The media place approach accentuates mediatized interactions and processes vital to resilience in places. By applying an interdisciplinary perspective, in this case media place research, on resilience research in tourism studies this paper has contributed to a broadened understanding of place resilience.

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