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Editorial

Perspectives on Destination Resilience and Innovation in Sustainable Tourism

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1. Framing the Special Issue

The tourism sector has been increasingly shaped by compounding forces, including those caused by the pandemic's aftershocks, accelerating climate risks, sociopolitical upheavals, governance and regulatory changes, shifts in market behavior, and rapid technological innovation (Gössling & Scott, 2025; Zhang et al., 2024). These forces are not isolated shocks but interconnected, globally intertwined dynamics; Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie (2025) argued that tourism is heading into a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) future. These shifts in the tourism sector are redefining the operating environment, creating both systemic risks and opportunities that require research to extend beyond traditional sectoral and geographic boundaries. To move toward more innovation and more sustainable futures, destinations must identify long-standing structural vulnerabilities, anticipate disruptions, and steer change toward better outcomes (Komasi et al., 2025; Mihalič, 2024).

To address these challenges, this Special Issue (SI), "Destination Resilience and Innovation for Advanced Sustainable Tourism Management," explores how destinations can strengthen resilience and foster innovation for sustainability. Destination resilience refers to protecting the tourism system from internal or external shocks, thereby ensuring recovery and progress rather than decline (Amore et al., 2018; Bethune et al., 2022). Meanwhile, resilience must be viewed in spatial and temporal terms; this involves the duration of the impacts (i.e., resistance and recovery) and the geographic scope affected, all while accounting for the causes of these issues (Jiao et al., 2025). Notably, destination resilience is a multilevel, multidimensional concept, embedded across ecological, socioecological, sociopolitical, socioeconomic, and sociotechnological domains, and among heterogeneous, interdependent stakeholders (Amore et al., 2018). The 14 papers published in this SI offer multilevel evidence from tourists, communities, businesses, organizations, sites, attractions, and destinations, showing how they build capabilities and address vulnerabilities during efforts to develop destination resilience. Acknowledging that these papers do not cover every aspect or level, we aim to advance understanding of destination resilience as well as to lead to innovation and sustainable futures.

2. Coverage and Analytical Lens

The 14 articles in this SI collectively show how destinations and their stakeholders respond to a spectrum of interlinked changes, including pandemic dynamics, climate risk, sociopolitical and heritage legitimacy questions, ecological limits, market shifts, business recoveries, and community development priorities, and how these pressures and opportunities translate into new capabilities. This SI encompasses a range of contexts, destination

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types, and business types, from large-scale country-level destination marketing to tourism businesses in regional areas, Small Island Developing States (SIDSs), community-based halal tourism villages, and local tourism leveraging natural and spiritual therapeutic assets. This SI also covers small-scale contexts, such as wildlife-viewing oceans, visitor behavior in national parks (protected areas), and the preservation and development of heritage and archaeological sites, as well as urban museum attractions. The level of analysis also varies in this SI. Macro-level studies focusing on regulatory frameworks and destination-scale thresholds form a substantial portion of the collection. We also include a set of meso-level analyses of organizations and sites (e.g., DMOs, firms, and communities), along with several papers examining micro-level tourist knowledge, attitudes, motivations, and behaviors. Across these settings, recurring themes come into view, including leadership and role clarity, multistakeholder collaboration, the integration of therapeutic assets, and communication systems that connect visitor education, interpretive legitimacy, and social media crisis management.

Methodologically, the researchers employed a diverse range of approaches, spanning data collection and analytical techniques. The quantitative approaches include surveys and structural equation modeling (SEM), whereas the qualitative and mixed methods encompass interviews, case studies, content analysis, systematic reviews, policy assessments, mixed strategic diagnostics (e.g., SWOT, IFAS, and EFAS), GIS and spatial analysis, online experiments, and conceptual evaluations. The focus on both planned and adaptive resilience advances knowledge. Planned resilience involves preparing in advance for unexpected events, as seen through examples such as governance arrangements, destination competitiveness, sustainability thresholds, and community capacity in this SI. This is balanced by adaptive resilience, which concerns post-event recovery (e.g., from COVID-19). In this SI, adaptive resilience is exemplified by areas such as digital crisis communication, tourism business recovery strategies, user-generated content and eWOM analytics, operational redesign, on-site education and enforcement, and destination resilience in active conflict contexts. We organize the contributions into four clusters, governance and policy, technology and data, climate and justice, and markets and recovery, to identify the mechanisms that cover these contexts.

3. Cluster A: Governance, Policy, and Collaboration

This cluster of studies draw on evidence from nature and heritage-based tourism, demonstrating that effective, multilevel participation and coordination are key to fostering cooperation and achieving a balance between preservation and development. For example, Espinoza-Rodríguez et al. (contribution 1) analyzed the Mexican whale-watching policy to determine its role in building socioecological resilience. They filtered 12 relevant studies from databases (e.g., Scopus, Web of Science, EBSCO, ProQuest, and Google Scholar) and synthesized the policies using narrative analysis. The results reveal the main types of noncompliance (e.g., vessel crowding, distance infractions, and unauthorized vessels). They also identified resilient governance elements in the policy, including flexibility, adaptability, multilevel governance, and participation. The researchers relate these governance attributes to socioecological factors, including whales and their habitats, tour operators, locals, the government, and researchers. The policy actions suggested include conservation and zoning, permitting and monitoring, collaborative monitoring, and the generation and distribution of scientific and training information. In general, the authors suggest that inclusive participation is fundamental for whale conservation and socioecological resilience.

Basyar et al. (contribution 2) examined collaborative governance in the Majapahit House heritage area to balance preservation efforts and cultural tourism development. The authors employed in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document

analysis to map the governance situation across multiple levels (central, regional, and village), multiple actors (government, private, and community), and multiple sectors (tourism, culture, and economy). The results show that a five-party arrangement can be achieved through collaborative leadership, coordinated planning and implementation, trust-building, and adaptive monitoring and evaluation. Conceptually, the researchers addressed the gaps in the Western-centric governance literature by integrating stakeholder analysis, collaborative governance, heritage tourism, cultural preservation, and tourism development; they developed a transferable analytical framework within this context. Their collaborative model links outcomes to tourism resilience (encompassing both economic and social sustainability), cultural preservation, empowerment (including capacity building and participation), and regional economic development.

4. Cluster B: Technology, Data, and Digitalization

This cluster of studies advance destination resilience by incorporating timely communication, market intelligence, and coordinated action. The evidence demonstrates how platform-based crisis messaging, user-generated review analytics, and village-level digital tools translate into stronger reputation management, value creation, and sustainable community development. Casal-Ribeiro et al. (contribution 3) rigorously examined how destination marketing organizations can effectively navigate prolonged crises in which they have limited responsibility. Grounded in situational crisis communication theory, the authors employed an exploratory sequential case study to analyze Portugal's strategic use of Facebook during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through interviews and content analysis, the researchers revealed how secondary response strategies, which did not directly address the crisis, aimed to reinforce the brand image and protect the destination's reputation. The findings underscore the importance of adaptive, image-focused communication strategies in sustaining public trust and engagement during uncertain times. This study is notable for its practical relevance and theoretical contribution. The authors not only mapped the internal decision-making and communication workflows of a national DMO but also identified actionable insights for tourism marketers facing similar low-responsibility crises.

Building from crisis communication to demand sensing, Liang et al. (contribution 4) employed a 3×3 factorial experimental design to demonstrate that eWOM has a stronger influence on perceived value than advertised price, with mixed eWOM significantly reducing value perceptions, albeit to a lesser extent than negative eWOM. Although perceived quality remained stable, final price perception was the dominant predictor of value formation, underscoring the limitations of price-based recovery strategies. The authors advocates for a strategic shift toward proactive eWOM management through influencer engagement, social listening, AI-driven communication, and real-time customer relationship management. Combining methodological rigor with practical insights, the study offers valuable contributions to academic discourse and industry practice.

Extending digital practice to community settings, Nurhayati et al. (contribution 5) examined the development of Benteng Tourism Village as a sustainable halal tourism destination through community-based approaches and digital transformation. Using a mixed-method design and SWOT analysis, the authors identified strengths such as cultural diversity and community engagement, alongside weaknesses in infrastructure and digital promotion. Positioned in a strength–opportunities quadrant, the authors recommend that the village adopts aggressive strategies, including enhanced digital marketing, infrastructure improvement, and stakeholder collaboration. The paper contributes to the sustainable tourism literature by integrating halal principles, community participation, and digital information within the triple bottom line framework, offering actionable insights for policymakers and practitioners.

5. Cluster C: Climate, Sustainability, and Justice

This cluster of studies examined tourism through four lenses: tourists' climate knowledge–attitude–practice gaps and the implications for policy and education; the justice and legitimacy of destination narratives via museum practices that confront colonial histories; sustainability thresholds for heritage, illustrated by archaeological tourism constraints and governance choices in a high-growth context; and the use of therapeutic milieus for resilient destination development. To start with, Guo et al. (contribution 6) systematically reviewed 76 studies on tourists' knowledge, attitudes, and practices toward climate change, revealing strong awareness of climate issues but limited behavioral change. Although many tourists recognize climate change as a global threat, few understand the responsibility and the actions required to tackle the climate crisis at the individual level. The authors examined several barriers stemming from social, political, and personal factors and proposed strategies, such as education and awareness of carbon footprints, to bridge the gap between awareness and action.

These findings indicate the direction for tourism stakeholders to encourage sustainable tourism and practice climate resilience. Referring to cultural legitimacy, Sanders et al. (contribution 7) examined how destination museums can address colonial legacies through sustainable curatorial practices. Drawing on a case study of European museums, the authors analyzed the impact of temporary supplementary labels that introduce counter-hegemonic narratives and amplify the voices of marginalized individuals. Although these interventions improved visitor engagement and challenged Eurocentric perspectives, their exclusion limited the effectiveness of short-term measures and increased the risk of moral licensing. The researchers highlight the importance of inclusive narratives, multilingual accessibility, digital archives, and community collaboration for stakeholders in the museum to create ethically accountable and resilient cultural destinations.

Addressing the issues of ecological and policy edges, De Man (contribution 8) examined the structural and contextual factors involved in initiating and implementing sustainable tourism at major archaeological sites in the United Arab Emirates. Although cultural heritage is considered an essential tourism diversification strategy, the challenges posed by sociocultural and economic factors arising from conservation issues and concerns about authenticity were explored. The author offers practical suggestions for tourism practitioners and policymakers, emphasizing the importance of site selection, community engagement, and digital innovation in enhancing sustainable and resilient archaeological tourism.

Pécsek and Gyurkó (contribution 9) conceptualizes therapeutic milieus, linking nature, spirituality, and health to promote overall well-being. They employed GIS mapping and field validation across three destination scales: a small town, a mid-sized town, and a county capital. Through this approach, the authors identified the key elements of therapeutic milieus in the study areas, defining their distinct value propositions. The authors acknowledge the current focus on sacred Christian sites and suggest that future research explore other cultural contexts and visitor perspectives.

6. Cluster D: Markets, Firms, and Recovery

This cluster of studies focused on how market-facing outcomes are shaped across various scales, including destination strategies, enterprise resilience to shocks, and visitor behaviors and motivations that influence responsible, ethical, and sustainable tourism outcomes. Sarmento et al. (contribution 10) focused on the case of Cape Verde (a Small Island Developing State). They developed a destination competitiveness framework with different levels of elements that shape tourist and resident eudaimonic well-being. These elements are categorized into core attractors and resources, support mechanisms, manage-

ment practices, policy/planning, and qualifying factors. The framework was supported by in-depth interviews with various stakeholders, including those from public, private, and civil society sectors. The results reveal positive and negative drivers across different layers, which help identify the factors that enhance and hinder capability development, meaning, and purpose. The framework can help policymakers and managers identify the strengths and weaknesses and link development choices with well-being outcomes that deliver a competitive advantage.

Focused on enterprise performance during crises, Cui and Shibusawa (contribution 11) analyzed the impact of COVID-19 on tourism-related firms in Japan's Nishimikawa region, a day-trip area actively promoting visitation. A business survey captured quarterly sales changes from April 2020 to September 2021; after filtering, 144 valid responses were analyzed across accommodation, restaurants, tourist facilities, and retail. Using multiple regression, the authors related sales to business attributes and pandemic factors, including new infections, state-of-emergency declarations, and the Go To Travel subsidy. The results indicate significant sales declines, especially for accommodation and restaurants, while tourist facilities and retail were less affected. The state of emergency, particularly the first declaration, had the strongest negative association with sales, and Go To had a limited impact on the day-trip market. The study recommends region-specific support and measures that stabilize demand over time.

Regarding behavior, Balaskas et al. (contribution 12) modeled responsible post-visit behavior (RPB) as the convergence of cognitive (environmental concern), experiential (perceived trip quality), and affective-transcendent (aesthetic/spiritual experience) inputs, operating through two proximal processes: satisfaction and personal norms. Using SEM data from Greek ecotourists, all the antecedents were found to exert a direct impact on RPB, and a partial mediation via satisfaction and norms was also supported. Multigroup tests revealed how meaningful differences exist among demographic factors and ecotourism experience, indicating segment-specific routes from experience to action. Managerially, the authors highlight the importance of norm-activating, transformational experiences and targeted education/policy levers to close the intention–behavior gap.

At South Africa's Kruger National Park (KNP), one of the region's flagship protected areas, Kuseni and Hermann (contribution 13) examined the prevalence and determinants of visitor noncompliance. They defined deviant leisure practices (DLPs) as behaviors that do not comply with KNP's codes of conduct. These codes were established using critical incident techniques with park managers. The authors then evaluated the participation in and reasons for these DLPs using a visitor survey. The results show uneven participation among tourists, with the most common acts being approaching animals for photographs and driving off-road. Conversely, removing archaeological objects and gathering prohibited items were the least frequent. The reported reasons for these behaviors clustered around creating memorable experiences and being in "holiday mode." Fisher's exact test was used to assess the associations between complaint behavior and reasons for noncompliance, and the authors recommend targeted management strategies to curb high-risk behaviors. This study supports focused visitor management through education and on-site enforcement, aiming to reduce high-risk actions while maintaining a positive visitor experience.

Ivanov and De Marchi (contribution 14) examined hot-war tourism as an emerging niche tourism product, using Ukraine as a case example. The authors distinguished hot-war tourism from other war-related tourism forms and explored how destinations experiencing ongoing conflict can, under certain extreme conditions, develop responsible offerings that support communities and enhance social awareness. Drawing on multiple qualitative sources, the authors analyzed visitor motivations and the roles of local actors in shaping meaningful, ethically informed experiences. The authors also raised critical

ethical questions about whether such tourism is primarily educational or exploitative, offering a structured lens for understanding motivations and stakeholder responses in active conflict contexts.

7. Beyond This Issue: Gaps and Next Steps

Despite our comprehensive efforts in covering various contexts, methodologies, multiple stakeholders, and different lenses to address destination resilience and innovation for advanced sustainable tourism management, certain limitations persist in the field. To start, this SI places strong emphasis on digital platforms and online content. However, little or no attention was devoted to automation, artificial intelligence (AI), or robotics related to destination resilience and sustainable tourism. In response to these research gaps, future studies could examine the impact of applications such as AI-enabled early warning systems, big data analysis, and visitor-flow management, while integrating governance and ethics into this context as managerial tools for enhancing destination resilience and innovation. Indigenous knowledge and governance were not addressed in this SI, indicating the need for further research on indigenous frameworks and the active integration of community resilience into destination planning and resilience practice (Chen et al., 2024).

Additionally, despite the importance of tourism businesses in establishing destination resilience, the evidence on how they build and maintain their own resilience remains fragmentary and warrants further research (O'Connor et al., 2025). These directions can be pursued to help advance destination resilience across the micro, meso, and macro levels, alongside collaboration among multiple stakeholders to foster innovation and sustainability. In conclusion, this SI explores various aspects of destination resilience and innovative solutions for managing sustainable tourism, presenting a diverse range of concepts, best practices, and implications for enhancing resilience and promoting sustainable tourism. By integrating multiple practices from different disciplines and socioeconomic and cultural perspectives, this SI highlights the resilience and sustainability of tourism, inspiring readers to explore both the theoretical and practical aspects, as well as recent trends in resilience and sustainable tourism.

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