

Transformative change

Resilience and sustainable tourism development for communities

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Abstract: *This article addresses the transformative role that tourism might play in developing economies. The main emphasis is on investment in sustainable community-based tourism as a way to alleviate poverty and improve livelihoods. Communities are representing sustainable and rooted social life while at the same time as a form of social structure, which can foster both social change and secure social coherence. We seek to explore whether the resilience perspective brings something new to discussions about tourism development and community, since earlier discussions have touched on subjects resembling “resilience”. By analyzing resilience in a community perspective, we argue that it might constrain the analytical use of the community concept. It seems to be just another tendency to move towards policy processes that are based on global (agendas) for how to construct resilience. These processes represent a top-down approach, limiting the notion of community rather than unfolding the proximities and distance embedded in community logics.*

Key words: Resilience, sustainable tourism development, Global South, community, development, policy.

A KEN, NUESTRO CARIÑO Y ADMIRACIÓN

Introduction

The World Bank (2012) has recently highlighted the transformative role that tourism might play in developing economies and societies with an emphasis on investment in sustainable community-based tourism as a viable way to alleviate poverty, generate growth and improve livelihoods. Communities are seen as representing sustainable and rooted social life while at the same time as a form of social structure, which can foster both social change and secure social coherence. Change and coherence is at the same time captured and reflected in the term “resilience”, which is emerging in social science research and policy planning. Whereas the resilience literature focussing on ecosystems is well developed, it is rather scarce for the local and community level. This article will focus on the discussion on resilience in relation to the debate surrounding planning and policies linked to development, tourism and community. Resilience is considered a foundational platform for generating sustainable development for communities.

This indicates a need for a focus on agents. When bringing agents into a discussion about resilience the concept is broadened out with leadership, social networks, institutional and organizational inertia, and change along with transformability and systems of adaptive governance to be included in the analysis (Folke, 2006: 263). As described later, this implies a move from having a single model to generate growth in tourism locations with a move towards diversification of actors and practices. In general terms, this involves a transformation in understanding the relationship between the tourism location and society. Such a transformation goes from models based on closed systems to ones based on open systems that entails exchange and distinct solutions to problems which we will elaborate further on.

We will address whether the resilience perspective brings something new to discussions about tourism development and community, considering that earlier discussions have touched on subjects resembling “resilience” (Allison/Hobbs, 2004; Biggs, 2011). More recently, and reflecting a broader social science agenda, tourism scholars have paid considerable attention to slow change variables, bringing resilience to the fore in analyses of the impacts of economic and social change in tourism destinations (among others Lew, 2013). Finally, we will scrutinize the concept of resilience in a community perspective in order to demonstrate that it might actually constrain the analytical use of the community concept.

Development models: from unity to diversity

In development thinking and policies, the economic perspective was prevalent in the beginning of the era of development. In modern times development aid started out with post-World War II Marshall aid that was provided to reconstruct Europe partly as a political project of curbing communism while also maintaining Western Europe as a sphere of interest for American foreign policy and economic influence. The aid to so-called “underdeveloped” (or “developing”) countries¹ in the 1960s and early 1970s was given as economic aid within the modernization paradigm – the ideal of the Global South being able to “catch up” economically. There was a thorough belief that development aid given for industrialization would create development in all sectors of society through the “trickle-down effect”. Thus economic development was conceptualized within an evolutionary framework. However, economic production as the sole basis for the development of a nation’s population turned out to have limitations. The progressive linear model according to which governments primarily stimulated growth in production began to be questioned (Chib, 1980).

The first tourism destinations to adopt this type of economic development model were the coastal areas, also called “sun and beach tourism”. The increase in hotels, resorts and services related to tourism in coastal areas such as Southern Spain, the French Riviera, Cancún in Mexico or Varadero in Cuba was only limited due to the lack of interest in using sustainable resources and investing in these both from domestic and foreign actors. Furthermore, the consequences of this type of development model became visible not only due to environmental damage such as water pollution and loss of flora, but also in sociocultural tensions that emerged due to enormous differences in livelihoods and income between those with access to tourist areas and those without. The unequal distribution of benefits generated by this development model affected the local populations and their possibility to form part of the decision-making process. These challenges paved the way to rethink how several natural ecosystems can be preserved despite the increasing population growth (WTO, 2005). A new development model was proposed based on a closed

¹ In this article we use the notion of “Global South”.

system, understood as a way to boost growth without affecting other elements in the system, i.e. the population and environment. This sustainable development model derived from the Brundtland Commission in 1987. Its report *Our Common Future* defines sustainability as ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987: s.p.). A later UN report defines sustainable tourism as ‘tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities’ (United Nations Environment Programme/World Tourism Organization, 2005: 12).

Even though most countries committed to the Brundtland commission, they lack capability in acting upon it and implementing sustainable processes. Instead, ecosystems have become more unstable due to climate change and biodiversity loss. Faced with such challenges, communities are increasingly interested in regulating natural resources such as water and electric power. However, the expansion of tourism, especially in destination such as golf resorts, winter sports and extreme sports areas, still relies on the over-exploitation, excessive consumption (and waste) of natural resources. In the Global South, tourism reflects the two problems already described: firstly that growth based only on economic activities maintains or generates unequal access to resources; secondly that tourism drives excessive exploitation of natural resources (Hall, 2010). One option is to abandon the idea of implementing one single development model for distinct tourism locations. As a point of departure, it is necessary to consider the specific economic, cultural, social, geographic and environmental characteristics of locations to tailor specific answers for each. This leads to a larger and more differentiated group of social actors involved as well as to distinctive practices and ways of using natural resources (Hamzah/Hampton, 2013). Resilience then relocates the idea of diversification as a basic premise in the planning of tourism locations.

Insights into sustainability and resilience

Whereas the sustainability perspective aims at mitigating change by maintaining resources above a normative safe level, the focus of resilience is to analyse how communities adapt to change by benefiting from the capabilities built up before anticipated and/or unanticipated disruption occurs (McLellan et al., 2012; Prasad et al., 2009).

Since Holling’s (1973) seminal paper on ecosystem resilience, scholarly interest in resilience thinking has spread out into diverse disciplines, many of which position society as a prominent component (Gunderson/Holling, 2002; Folke, 2006). This integration of a specifically social dimension within the resilience perspective has been the source of much debate in the literature, particularly surrounding the nature-society (Davidson-Hunt/Berkes, 2002) and the structure-agency dichotomies (Westley et al., 2002). A handful of studies (among others Allison/Hobbs, 2004; Walker et al., 2004) have attempted to resolve the dichotomy between nature and society by proposing the concept of social-ecological systems. Resilience is then constituted of a complex set of relationships between the basic components of development – economy, population and nature. As complementary to these components, the challenge lies in integrating the above-mentioned elements into explanatory logics such as the market, welfare and preservation, as they form part of the same reality (Holling, 2003). Resilience is based on an open system model where the possibility of transformation allows for resistance and recovery after disturbances or disruptions (Berkes/Colding/Folke, 2003). Unlike this, most of the

practices promoting development in the last century were considered sustainable due to the policies and technologies that were implemented. However, these perceived all societies as having similar characteristics and presumed that the implementation of sustainable policies would have similar economic, organizational, technological, environmental effects. Even though they turn out to be successful in one part of the world, they failed in other parts. Despite the interest in environmental and sustainable development practices, the model continued to prioritize economic measures due to the focus on technology without taking the unpredictability of nature into consideration (Holling, 2003).

The implementation of these homogeneous schemes cannot be explained only by the influence of existing economic or political interest groups or social agents but also by the adherence of development models derived from closed systems. A basic principle of closed systems is that development and economic growth are only achievable if they start from the same initial conditions. Consequently, an obvious logic for all economies was to apply the same schemes which already had generated growth in developed economies. Nevertheless, the results on growth were in most cases little or none which then raised questions about the basic principles of these models as drivers for development (among others Bertalanffy, 1989).

As modernization policies proved to fail in many countries in the Global South, the focus turned towards the local level in search for ways to make aid “work”. The alternative development paradigm gained ground in both development theories and in development aid, and the “bottom-up” perspective was implemented in order to link aid directly to the relevant local context to give the beneficiaries of aid a voice. Alternative development turns towards concepts such as participation, empowerment and capability which highlight the inclusion of local actors in the development process. Nonetheless, development projects are still primarily formulated by Western donors and implemented in developing countries on the basis of consultancy reports on what the locals need (Escobar, 1997; Santos, 2012). The definitions of empowerment and participation depart from Western oriented ways of designing and implementing, ignoring the particular sociocultural and political processes at play in communities. Participation is hard to achieve as long as one is operating with donors giving money for projects to improve livelihood conditions for others, even though concepts like “partnership” and “ownership” have become development buzz-words (Cornwall, 2007; Mikkelsen, 2005; Chambers, 2012).

The resilient development model might represent a substantial change in both the perception of the different groups or social actor’s role and the way problems can be resolved. Unlike closed systems, open systems can achieve similar results starting from a different organization of its components. In this sense, the diversity of actors and practices are not perceived as a problem, but as procedures to follow, namely differentiated solutions to specific problems (Folke, 2006). Resilience is constituted by the mechanisms, methods and knowledges by which a system can maintain its own performance when facing challenges or disturbances (Holling, 1973; Berkes/Colding/Folke, 2003). Walker, Holling, Carpenter and Kinzig define resilience as ‘the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and reorganize while undergoing change so as to still retain essentially the function, structure, identity and feedbacks’ (Walker et al., 2004: s.p.). Furthermore, Folke considers the main characteristics of resilience to be:

- (1) *the amount of disturbance a system can absorb and still remain within the same state or domain of attraction,*
- (2) *the degree to which the system is capable of self-organization (versus lack of organization, or organization forced by external factors), and*

(3) *the degree to which the system can build and increase the capacity for learning and adaptation.* (Folke, 2006: 259-260)

In the case of social systems, resilience as ‘the capacity for renewal, reorganization and development’ (Folke 2006: 253) generates the adaptive capacity of a society which is necessary to survive disturbances, for instance those created by a hurricane. Furthermore, in a tourism context it is particularly significant as most activities take place in coastal areas where climate change is very visible. The perspective then paves the way to focus on agency as a network of social relations rather than perceiving it as a linear process of intentionality (Dwiartama/Rosin, 2014).

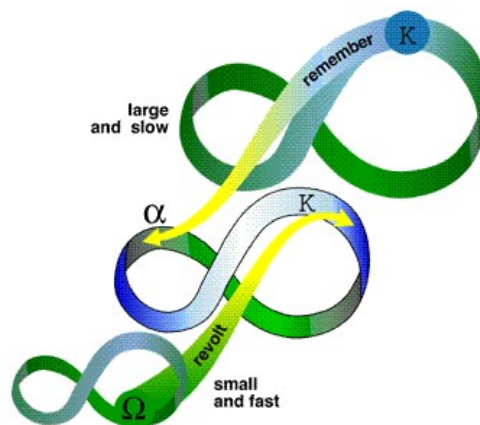


Fig. 1: Panarchy. Source: Folke, 2006: 258, adapted from Gunderson and Holling, 2002.

The above model illustrates the community’s potential for creating opportunities when a change occurs e.g. from a natural disaster. When a village is flooded the conditions after the disaster are not the same as before. The village may have a capability to deal with the changed situation – or it may not. In the case where the village copes and develops new tools to sustain a new situation, resilience is at play, as the situation after the disaster is different from before, and (good) change has happened. As stated by Young ‘resilience allows for temporary changes in functioning and dynamics, as long as the system remains within the same stability domain’ (Young et al., 2006: 306). As demonstrated in Figure 1, resilience thus means to “jump back”, but it is not returning to the same situation as before but to a “new” situation, which is based on the original situation while at the same time different. This happens in a series of events and it is not framed as “evolution” as there is no assessment of the new situation being “better” than before. Rather it is a way of adapting to new circumstances, using the experiences of the past to create something new. Resilience then is connected to the concepts of vulnerability and adaptability and refers to the capacities of the system (as a whole) (Young et al., 2006). This also implies that resilience in social science is intimately linked to studies of change as change implies adaptability.

Resilience, originating from an ecological research tradition, has evolved and is being used in social sciences as well. Apart from abrupt disturbances, such as those experienced from natural disasters, other disturbances can occur which influence on the resilience perspective from a social science point of view. Disturbances, or changes, can also influence communities, for example armed conflicts, migration movements – or tourism. These too will influence on a community’s resilience, but with a multiplicity of approaches to the response of a change (Bec/Dredge, 2014) given that a community is a complex entity.

Questioning resilience: agents and power in tourism development

Within tourism, the concept of resilience has largely focused on economic resilience (rather than cultural, institutional or infrastructure resilience), and most tourism-related resilience research has focused on case studies rather than advancing theoretical constructs. Some scholars have provided comprehensive overviews for the resilience perspective in tourism. However, the focus has been on the recovery of tourism industries from disaster and crisis preparation (Ritchie, 2009; Hall/Timothy/Duval, 2004). The challenge is to understand how and why some communities persist, reorganize and develop after a disturbance or crisis. The resilience perspective seeks to shed light on the context and needs of the individuals and tourism entities involved. The resilience perspective recognizes that people perceive and manage slow changes in the environment, culture and society in a different manner than they do under sudden major crises in these systems. One of the challenges is whether resilience is only at play in smaller social systems like communities or whether the concept can be used in analyses of nation-states and the frameworks (political, juridical, social, cultural) which states provide for communities to thrive. Some researchers are opening up for a much broader use of the resilience concept (Folke, 2006), according to which agency is a necessary integrated part of resilience, for instance by linking it up to the actor-network theory (Dwiartama/Rosin, 2014). Despite the opening of resilience to include social networks, institutional and organizational inertia and change, actors such as private entrepreneurs have a fundamentally different focus in addressing resilience issues from that of public or community interests.² These actors' different interests can overlap and during a community's transition, common interests can come into play such as corporate social responsibility and community economic development policies.

Analysis and implementation of resilience mechanisms to enable conservation systems certainly constitute a relevant field of research. However, we argue that the capacity of resilience as a mechanism for developing tourism planning and policies needs to be questioned despite having several advantages compared to the traditional policies for development of tourism areas. We recognize the following issues as major challenges if we consider to use resilience as a principle to understand a community's adaptability in a context of tourism development. First, the principle of the system's conservation is that resilience constitutes the basic platform to make the system work. This and its diverse components and subsystems seek to generate conservation. However, this basic platform lacks clarity when we focus on and apply it to tourism activities. For instance, the system's (economic) conservation does not consist of agents with an equal perception of tourism nor does tourism have equal implications for the different stakeholders. For some of the agents within tourism, environmental conservation, the population or the economic interests in a specific locality or region are not necessarily the principal concern or the main aim of their actions (investments). This could be due to their interests being only consumer-oriented (such as tourists staying at all-inclusive resorts where the principle aim is their personal comfort), or because basically their presence in this locality relates to an economic calculation which can change if the locality's conditions change (such as seasonal workers, international hotel chains or other business).

² For instance destination marketing organizations and local or regional governments.

Secondly, we question the scale of the resilience perspective, that is the equation of natural and social systems and the assumption that there exist mechanisms that support the maintenance of the system. We then argue that it is often ignored that agents give meaning and value to places and ideas. Also social life in itself is very different from what happens in nature. In some cases, natural mechanisms for the conservation of species/fauna or flora require the disappearance of other species to secure survival in nature. Thus, in applying the principle of resilience to the context of economic functioning in tourism we necessarily have to consider that this is a business operating at a global scale. In maintaining the economic system, different stakeholders, such as business owners, local residents, tourists or state authorities, operate at different scales and have unequal access to resources. For instance, to transnational corporations such as hotel and restaurant chains, an increase in taxes or measures to create more sustainable tourism processes might reduce the attractiveness of certain tourism destinations and lead the business to move its investment to other less regulated destinations. Such a situation mirrors the sentiments of Marx who showed the union's demands to increase the worker's conditions have limits due to the existence of an "reserve army of labor" which is always ready to work for lower wages. Consequently, using resilience as the regulatory principle for being able to generate development in a community is very challenging due to the global scale of tourism and the disparity in regulations and involvement of different stakeholders.

Thirdly, we question the understanding of participation and local knowledge versus agency. Although theories of social systems recognize the existence of different structures within social systems (significance, domination and legitimation), the proposed resilience perspective for a development model emphasizes knowledge and local participation as ways in which local or regional development are generated in a sustainable manner. However, as various scholars have shown (among others Simpson, 2008) the local capacity to participate and to share knowledge in regions or localities where tourism is the main productive activity, are often insufficient or very limited. In addition, tourism is not an activity that has been characterized by preserving diversity, on the contrary tourism seeks to generate homogeneity in the type of activities and services offered to tourists. The search of homogeneity is not only preferred by business owners but also a value that enjoys a degree of acceptance and preference in a significant segment of tourists.

Limits of resilience in a tourism development context

As shown in the work of Andersson, Clausen and Gyimóthy (2014), the term "community" has contrasting definitions in different social sciences. A common element in these definitions is that the community is a type of social system, spatially defined and characterized by its proximity between members against the outside.

The reconstruction of communities is one of society's basic interests and we believe that putting resilience forward in the planning process and integrating it into policies in order to construct or reconstruct resilience can constrain the analytical use of "community". Community is often defined as either from a "traditional" point of view as 'being both congruous and fixed in space and time' (Dredge/Jamal, 2013: 561) or as more fluid with no fixed borders. Whereas the expansion of global tourism flows, mobilities and "liquid communities" (Dredge/Jamal, 2013) require and create a new opening to understand the community resources that constitute the logics of cohesion, the resilience perspective paves tends to adopt an essentialist notion of the "community" – as a homogeneous social entity bound to a specific

geographical location. Seemingly, it is assumed that communities respond in uniform ways either positively or negatively to transformations whenever a disruption occurs. This, however, resembles former ideas of development where a (Western) top-down approach was seen as the “solution” to problems in the Global South (Parpart/Veltmeyer, 2004). We argue that these constructions limit our understanding of the resources available, which are essential in order to understand community logics and generate community development. There is a need to reflect upon how socially constructed ideas and images of community and mobilities are reproduced to comprehend their influence on tourism development projects as well as policy planning. Instead, we argue that communities are neither cohesive objects nor homogeneous instruments for implementing community-based development initiatives. Most communities are too diffuse with blurred boundaries that span regional, national and continental frontiers with many people often making their livelihoods outside the immediate geographic area.

Even though the majority of studies agree that the strengths of communities consists in social networks, communication and a sense of belonging (social capital) including readiness to accept change and learning abilities (Buikstra et al., 2010), these studies still consider the community as place-bound. Even though they recognize that resilience concepts apply best to place-based communities (Berkes et al., 2010), scholars keep insisting on the usefulness of resilience, defining it as an ‘integrated approach’ to be pursued by communities in general to generate development (Berkes/Ross, 2013). Even though resilience seems to draw upon characteristics from the notion of social capital as forming part of the platform for the community’s cohesion, resilience also integrates adaptability and acceptance of change as essential characteristics. For a community to be resilient it has to have endurance when it comes to the use of its capabilities both over time and in relation to different actors. Thus incorporating resilience in development aid and policies is thought to “activate” social resources in the community. Some of the strategies used are to construct mechanisms for local participation and knowledge exchange in communities in order to create the robustness that makes adaptation possible, a characteristic considered a prerequisite for resilience (Berkes/Ross, 2013). However, as stated before, one of the challenges in applying resilience is that it presupposes communities to have a stable, linear history. It understands a community as a homogenous entity with either a pre-existing platform to build on, or which can provide tools or resources, through planning and policies, that can stimulate the production of social capital. For our discussion, the notion of “robustness” is relevant as it ‘refers to the structural and other properties of a system that allow it to withstand the influence of disturbances without changing structure or dynamics’ (Young et al., 2006: 305). However, one of the analytical problems with social capital is that it is a concept that has evaded clear definition (Fine, 2010).

Some final reflections

Projects established on community-based approaches in order to generate sustainable development tend to promote participatory, community-enhancing processes. They are also founded on building cohesion and a sense of community while aiming to achieve tangible outcomes. This results in building social strengths and agency which can be seen as resilience-building strategies (Berkes/Ross, 2013) However, as we have stated, existing tourism research points towards development projects’ lack of inclusion of the community in decision making processes. Instead of constructing participatory processes development planners marginalize

community groups (Höckert, 2011) and leave transnational corporations and stakeholders to select and carry out tourism projects, often with the argument that they have the market logic skills, capacities and knowledge (Simpson, 2008). At the same time we argue that resilience seems to be just another pathway or tendency to move towards planning and policy processes that are based on global agendas for how to construct resilience from a top-down approach. It tends to restrict the notion of community rather than unfolding the proximities and distance embedded in community logics which can generate and foster development from a bottom-up perspective. One of our main arguments to question the resilience concept is due to the limitations both by defining resilience through a socio-ecological lens and by restraining the notion of community. This then resembles former notions of development (Parpart/Veltmeyer 2004) which saw (Western) ideas from the Global North and a top-down approach as “the solution” to problems or challenges in the Global South.

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