Grasping for Resilience

*Tourism and Resilience: Individual, Organisational and Destination Perspectives*

C. Michael Hall, Girish Prayag and Alberto Amore

2018, Channel View Publications, Bristol, UK, 189 pages, £24.95/$34.95/€29.95 (paperback), ISBN-13: 918-1-84541-629-4

Although carrying a 2018 publication date, Hall, Prayag and Amore’s review of resilience theory and thinking in the context of tourism came out in mid-2017, which made it the first book ever published on that topic. It was also the first of four books on tourism and resilience that came out in late 2017 (the others were: Butler 2017, Cheer & Lew 2018, and Lew & Cheer 2018). While this makes for an exciting awakening of tourism scholars to the conceptual frameworks offered by resilience thinking and resilience theory, it is also a shame that these books are not able to build upon the contributions that each has to offer. Hall, Prayag and Amore’s *Tourism and Resilience: Individual, Organisational and Destination Perspectives* is the only authored book among the four tourism and resilience publications, the others being edited volumes. Being authored, it is the most cohesive from beginning to end, avoiding overlapping material and significant gaps that are sometimes associated with edited books. It is also the smallest (fewest pages) among the four books, contains the least number of in-depth case studies (basically none, though there are many boxed cases), and is by far the cheapest in price. It is the first book in a new series (“Tourism Essentials”) that publishes short volumes in a well-defined area of tourism studies. This book meets that criteria. It is a concise, though not fully comprehensive, review of the literature, which should be popular for those writing dissertations and theses. The other three resilience and tourism books, however, offer more contextual applications of resilience theory, through which they press to expand our understanding of resilience applications to tourism. In that way, the authors of this book complement the other three resilience books by offering an introductory overview for the detailed cases that the others provide.

Within its 189 pages, the authors cover three major approaches to resilience and tourism: individual or psychological resilience, organizational or business resilience, and destination or community resilience. In addition, there are two introductory chapters and a conclusion chapter. The first two chapters define resilience theory in the context of anthropogenic global change. One of the challenges in defining resilience is distinguishing between disaster or crisis change events, and other, slower change processes. The first chapter tends to emphasize contemporary fast change issues (such as climate change), which also tends to dominate much of the book. Other chapters, however, offer better recognition of slower change processes. Chapter two focusses specifically on the fundamental ways that resilience is defined, both across different disciplines and from the perspective of social-ecological systems theory. The adaptive cycle and panarchy scale relationships are introduced here, although as important as these are to the history and definitions of resilience, they do not show up in any significant way in subsequent chapters of the book.

After laying a foundation that lays out the more common understandings of resilience, as well as the definitional fuzziness of the concept, the authors move to individual resilience in chapter three. Of the three levels or scales of resilience covered in the book, this level is the least explored by tourism scholars. On the other hand, it may be the most studied level of resilience due to the widespread use of the concept of resilience in the human health professions. However, this approach to resilience, with its focus on the psychological conditions of the individual, varies considerably from the ecological resilience models that form the basis of social-ecological resilience. The most evident application of psychological resilience in tourism studies is in employee management and human resource relations. The authors point out that the resilience of tourists (and the “resilient tourist” idea) is a largely virgin area of potential tourism research.

The fourth chapter is titled organisational resilience, by which the authors mostly take a business resilience perspective. Non-business organizations are only lightly covered in this chapter. Somewhat like individual (or psychological) resilience, business resilience studies have built up a distinct body of literature, which is covered well by the authors, and which includes a good number of tourism studies. Different ideas on what resilience means in a business environment are covered, along with theories on how to create resilience in a business organization. A lot of this is focused on crisis management, which is a popular topic in business management in general. Apparently recognizing this limitation, at the end of this chapter the authors try to place organizational/business resilience more squarely in the context of the social-ecological systems approach to resilience. This section is different and tends to lean toward a community resilience perspective, which is probably an appropriate transition to chapter five in the book.

The fifth chapter is on destination resilience, which is essentially community resilience in a tourism destination context. Perhaps reflecting my own professional background and research interests, I found this the most interesting part of the book. It is also where social-ecological resilience concepts seem to have received the greatest applications in the literature, although adaptive cycles and panarchies are still sparse. The recent earthquake history and recovery experience of Christchurch, New Zealand provides considerable coverage and insight, in part because it has been well studied, and in part as a reflection of the location of the home institution of the three authors. Urban resilience, a somewhat distinct area of community resilience is covered, and interestingly, the authors also discuss the roles of individual/psychological resilience and organizational/business resilience to the larger context of destination/community resilience. The only major production flaw in the book was the mostly unreadable Figure 5.2 that shows “elements of destination resilience”, but with text too small to be readable without a good magnifying glass.

The final concluding chapter is titled “Is Resilience a Resilience Concept?”, which is a provocative question, reflecting the frustrations of the authors, and I think many researchers, in trying to grapple with the definition and application of resilience. Like sustainable development, resilience seems to be an obvious concept that is rapidly problematized as it is adopted and adapted in different disciplinary and place contexts. Unlike the other three books on resilience and tourism, which mostly focus on community resilience, with some business resilience case studies, Hall, Prayag and Amore attempt to introduce and integrate in a balanced way the full range of ways that resilience thinking is being used in the social sciences today, to understand issues related to tourism. As a result, they may be even more aware of the definitional problems and challenges that a resilience approach presents. They (Hall, et al. 2018) note that “The wide spectrum of resilience concepts that has emerged in scientific literature attests to the contested nature of the concept” (p. 146), and “Its meaning must be specifically defined, its properties articulated in each situation and the conditions under which resilience is experienced well understood” (p. 156). The synthesis in this chapter is admirable, even if the level of understanding in the end leaves much to be desired. This has more to do with the nature of the subject than the skills of the authors. Already, however, a second edition of this book is begging to be written, to incorporate the plethora of new tourism scholarship on resilience that has come out in just in 2017 alone.

References Cited

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Alan A. Lew  
Department of Geography, Planning and Recreation  
Northern Arizona University  
Flagstaff, Arizona, USA  
alan.lew@nau.edup