Heritage Tourism and Historic Preservation: An integrated approach towards resilience in cultural & heritage tourism destinations

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Resilience is becoming an increasingly important concept of academic study. Resilience is defined as “the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and reorganize while undergoing change so as to still retain essentially the same function, structure, identity, and feedbacks” (Walker et al. 2004). Resilience in a tourism context has been defined as the “ability of social, economic or ecological systems to recover from tourism induced stress” (Tyrrell & Johnston, 2008). Managing change constitutes a key concern in order to address uncertainties associated with economic fluctuations, political instabilities, environmental hazards, climate change, etc., in tourism destinations. Historic Preservation and Heritage Tourism have also made the connection with the concept of resilience and its use in relation to climate change and environmental hazards, e.g. in disaster planning and recovery (Spennemann, 2007; Ritchie, 2009).

This conference paper presentation argues for a new paradigm in tourism studies: An integrated approach to resiliency in Heritage Tourism and Historic Preservation, using resilience as an integral link between both areas, enables a sustainability-oriented approach to cultural heritage and tourism management. The conference paper and presentation will identify and discuss the use of resilience in a range of disciplinary areas and fields of study, including historic preservation and heritage tourism. An important aim of this exploration will be to understand and ‘make visible’ often neglected parameters in the interactions between social, cultural, economic and environmental dimensions in cultural heritage and tourism. Of especial interest in this interdisciplinary study is to examine not only how material and physical built heritage is being addressed in heritage management and resiliency planning, but also how intangible parameters are addressed, including the role of social, political, cultural, and ethnic values (Groat & Wang, 2002). Various notions and applications of resilience will be examined, such as the concept of cultural resilience (Jamal, 2013). A range of case examples will be used to illustrate how resilience parameters interact in this integrated approach to historic preservation and heritage tourism management.

In Disaster Management, an important shift has occurred from a defensive approach focused in the vulnerability of communities (which concentrates on weaknesses to be improved in order to resist the impact of natural events) towards community resilience (which considers the strengths and proactive capacity for recovery after natural events impact) (Mayunga J. S., 2009). This shift opens new perspectives on the social dimension in disaster management: it recognizes the value of societal constructs such as the relationship between people and places, sense of community and identity. In Historic Preservation, i.e., “the management and conservation of our built heritage” (Columbia University, 2013), the preservation of tangible and intangible heritage has been recognized as having a decisive role in “the formation of a national consciousness, in national unity, and economic and social development. (Edson, 2004). Aspects connecting “community’s emotional links” with resilience are related to population wellness “defined as high and non-disparate levels of mental and behavioral health, functioning, and quality of life” (Norris et al. 2008). Intangible aspects of tourism related to resilience can similarly include, for instance, “social relations with, and social constructions of, ‘nature’” that are “deeply embedded in geopolitical and cultural influences” and “symbolic meanings and myths” (Graham, Ashworth, & Tunbridge 2000).
An integrated approach to Historic Preservation and Heritage Tourism, through the bridging notion of cultural resilience, offers a valuable new narrative that challenges and complements managerialist scientific-based approaches to the sustainability of cultural & heritage tourism destinations.

References


