



Tourism and Resilience

How Tourism Destinations Can Position Themselves Resiliently for Upcoming Crises

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Abstract. This article explores the resilience of tourism destinations in the face of crises, emphasizing the necessity of systematic preparation and adaptive strategies. Drawing on scenario technique as a methodological approach, the study demonstrates how destinations can account for multiple possible futures and adapt to dynamic and disruptive changes. The concept of resilience is analyzed on the destination level, highlighting the importance of economic, social and political, human, natural and physical, and demand-side resources. Based on Cahyanto and Pennington-Gray (2017), these resource categories are linked to strategic actions developed within a research project at the Baden-Wuerttemberg Cooperative State University. The Black Forest National Park destination management organization was examined and monitored by a team of researchers over a period of more than a year. Five strategic fields are identified: financial independence and security, communication and cooperation, balanced tourism, sustainable and barrier-free infrastructure, and the enhancement of quality of life for locals and guests. The findings underscore that resilience is not a static status but an ongoing process of learning, adaptation, and innovation. The article concludes that destinations integrating resilience into strategic planning will be better equipped to recover from crises and to build long-term competitiveness, while also stressing the need for a holistic perspective that includes social, ecological, and cultural dimensions.

Keywords: resilience, destination management, scenario technique

1 Problem Statement and Objective

The tourism industry has long been exposed to a wide range of crises that have substantially influenced both travel behavior and economic stability. These crises include economic and financial shocks, such as the global financial crisis of 2008/2009, political conflicts such as the Kosovo War or the Syrian refugee crisis, as well as natural disasters including the avalanche disaster in Galtür in 1999, the tsunami in Sri Lanka in 2004, and the eruption of the Eyjafjalla volcano in Iceland in 2010. Each of these

events has underscored the high degree of vulnerability of the tourism sector to external disruptions.

Epidemics and diseases have likewise exerted significant impacts on international travel. Prominent examples include avian influenza in Hong Kong, BSE in England, SARS in Asia, and Ebola in West Africa. Beyond health-related crises, rising crime rates and terrorist attacks – for instance in South Africa, Turkey, and Paris – have posed substantial challenges. Moreover, risks such as kidnappings, particularly in countries such as Yemen, have further undermined tourists' sense of safety and security. Other crises are possible (World Economic Forum 2025).

In addition, recent years have witnessed the emergence of another critical phenomenon: so-called “overtourism.” Cities such as Barcelona and Venice exemplify destinations under disproportionate and unsustainable tourist pressure, leading not only to ecological and social tensions but also to reputational risks that can diminish their long-term attractiveness.

Taken together, this diversity of crisis scenarios highlights the necessity for the tourism sector not only to respond to familiar risks but also to anticipate and prepare for unforeseen and complex developments. In this context, the development of resilience strategies is of central importance, as they strengthen the capacity of destinations and stakeholders to withstand and adapt to multifaceted crises.

The guiding research question of this study is therefore: How can tourism destinations and tourism stakeholders effectively prepare for future – and in part unpredictable – crisis situations? The objective of this thesis is to design a resilience concept for tourism destinations and destination management organizations that, through the formulation of appropriate strategies and measures, ensures the capacity of the tourism sector to act in times of crisis. Furthermore, it aims to demonstrate how destination management organizations and relevant stakeholders can establish long-term sustainable structures that not only facilitate short-term crisis management but also foster opportunities for innovation and transformation.

This closes a gap in research. To date, no study has developed a resilience concept for destinations that, in addition to a clear analysis, has also succeeded in developing concrete strategies for dealing with crises. At a time when destinations are facing more and more crisis situations and demanding answers, this is a worthwhile and important undertaking.

The subsequent structure of the thesis is as follows: first, the methodological approach of scenario technique will be introduced. Thereafter, the concept of resilience in general, as well as resilience in the specific context of tourism destinations, will be defined. Building upon these foundations, a resilience framework will be presented, which seeks to provide a systematic basis for strengthening the robustness and future viability of the tourism industry.

2 Methodology: Scenario Technique

Initially applied in a military context for strategic planning, scenario technique became of interest in the 1960s and 1970s due to turbulent markets and the growing importance of global influencing factors for companies such as General Electric and Royal Dutch Shell, which began systematically developing company-specific visions of the future. The 1972 report *Limits to Growth* by the Club of Rome also made use of scenario technique (Steinmüller et al. 2000: 37–54; Mietzner & Reger 2004: 48–50). Today, scenario technique is applied in a wide variety of contexts, including strategic corporate planning, urban and regional planning, policy consulting, and in connection with global challenges such as climate change and energy (Kosow & Gaßner 2008: 7). In tourism, scenario technique has already found application as well. For example, within the KLIFF research project, scenario analysis was used to illustrate the potential impacts of climate change on the Lüneburger Heide and Harz regions (Kreilkamp et al. 2012). More recently, in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Federal Competence Center for Tourism (2020) developed scenarios regarding the potential course of the pandemic and the recovery of the tourism sector.

The analytical instrument of scenario technique is based on two assumptions: first, that the future cannot be predicted with precision, and therefore there is not a single future but multiple possible futures. Second, it assumes that society, technology, and politics are becoming increasingly complex and dynamic, making it insufficient to describe the future as a simple system. Instead, complex visions of the future must be created that take into account continuous change, shifting conditions, and disruptive developments (Gausemeier 1996: 83; Kosow & Gaßner 2008: 6).

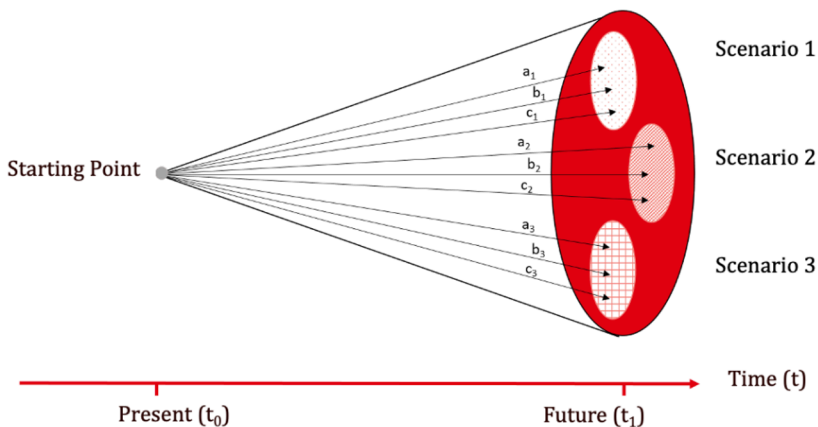


Fig. 1. The scenario funnel (own figure 2025, according to Götze 1993: 40; Gausemeier 1996: 91; Minx / Böhlke 2006: 19; Kusow / Gaßner 2008: 13)

The scenario funnel illustrated in Figure 1 demonstrates the principle of multiple futures under consideration of different developments. The opening of the funnel from

the present (t_0) toward the future (t_1) symbolizes the increasing uncertainty and the growing number of possible developments in the future.

Different manifestations of the factors are conceivable. By examining the factors or the funnel at a specific point in the future (here: point t_1), different scenarios can be constructed that represent the range of possible developments. As illustrated by the scenario funnel, each scenario is generated by selecting and consolidating different manifestations of the factors.

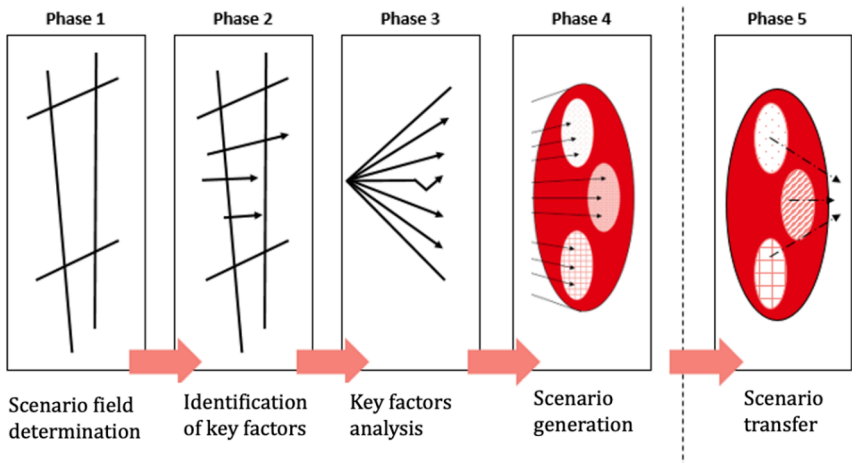


Fig. 2. The five ideal-typical phases of the scenario process (own figure 2025, based on Kosow & Gaßner 2008: 20)

The derivation of scenarios can be described through the scenario process. Depending on the author, this process comprises between four and eight phases (e.g. Gausemeier 1996; Steinmüller 2002). Despite the variety of interpretations, there is broad consensus regarding the overall procedure. According to Kosow and Gaßner (2008), the following five-phase structure can be considered the ideal-typical basic model of the scenario process (see Figure 2).

Phase 1: Definition of the scenario field – The research subject is defined and described. This involves delimiting the subject thematically, spatially, and temporally.

Phase 2: Identification of key factors – Key factors or descriptors relevant to the overall research question are identified. These are central variables that describe the scenario field, act upon it, or represent its effects outward. In the further course of the process, these key factors are the trends, parameters, events, and developments whose trajectories and manifestations are examined.

Phase 3: Analysis of key factors – The key factors are analyzed with regard to their possible future manifestations. In doing so, the scenario funnel is constructed. For each factor relevant to the scenario field, its possible variations are considered, and those selected are carried forward into the subsequent scenario construction.

Phase 4: Scenario generation – This marks the completion of the scenario process in the narrow sense. In this step, consistent bundles of factors and their variations are assembled and developed into scenarios. A future projection point is selected as the reference. To ensure the scenarios can be meaningfully distinguished and interpreted, their number should be limited to a maximum of four to five.

Phase 5: Scenario transfer – This phase is only occasionally included in descriptions of scenario technique. It concerns the application and further processing of the developed scenarios.

3 Resilience and Resilience Concept for Destinations

Resilience, often translated as “resistance to crisis” (Plöger & Lang 2013), determines how a system or an individual survives a crisis. It is not a fixed status but an ongoing process. The concept has found widespread application in fields such as materials science, engineering, psychology, sociology, and economics. In tourism research and practice, resilience is now indispensable, particularly in the context of destinations (Luthe & Wyss 2014; Sheppard & Williams 2016).

According to Cahyanto and Pennington-Gray (2017), resilience in destinations can be fostered through the development of specific types of resources. Economic resources are essential, for example through budget allocations within destination management organizations, the generation of tourism value creation, access to markets, and the use of key performance indicators in hotels. In addition, social and political resources play a crucial role, including the presence of support structures in times of crisis, strong tourism leadership, government backing, crisis and disaster management systems, and partnerships with organizations and stakeholders that can assist in emergencies. These also encompass early warning mechanisms as well as emergency and evacuation plans.

Human resources, or human capital, are equally important. These involve the knowledge and crisis experience of actors, the ability to learn from past events, heightened crisis awareness, and strong organizational skills. Natural and physical resources also contribute to resilience, such as the quality of infrastructure and tourism assets, reliable emergency water supply, communication devices, electricity, shelters and emergency accommodations, transport routes and evacuation possibilities, as well as disaster-proof construction. Finally, visitor-related resources support resilience through maintaining high levels of visitor satisfaction, cultivating a positive image of the destination, and sustaining stable visitor numbers.

Building on the resource dimensions identified by Cahyanto and Pennington-Gray (2017), a resilience concept for destinations was further developed within a research

project at the Baden-Wuerttemberg Cooperative State University (DHBW). The model connects resources to concrete strategies, emphasizing that resilience requires both the availability of capacities and their purposeful application.

The work was based on extensive research and studies in the Black Forest, specifically in the Black Forest National Park destination. Over a period of more than a year, a comprehensive situation analysis was carried out in collaboration with local stakeholders, followed by the joint development of strategies. This was based on a comprehensive theoretical framework.

Five strategic fields were defined. The first field, achieving financial independence and security, refers to reducing financial vulnerability and securing long-term stability. This includes, for example, the optimal use of municipal budget funds and the transparent distribution of subsidies through formal agreements.

The second field, strengthening communication and cooperation, highlights the importance of enhancing collaboration among stakeholders and improving information flows to foster coordinated crisis responses. In this context, a systematic inventory of actors and communication channels is essential, accompanied by the development of communication guidelines that ensure clarity and reliability.

The third field, promotion of balanced tourism, focuses on encouraging sustainable development that aligns economic, social, and ecological needs. This requires the establishment of comprehensive quality standards and the regular monitoring of customer satisfaction in order to maintain long-term competitiveness.

The fourth field, expansion of a barrier-free, sustainable infrastructure, emphasizes the need to invest in accessible and environmentally sustainable facilities that increase resilience. A particular priority should be given to the use of local building materials in construction projects.

Finally, the fifth field, **increasing the quality of life for locals and guests**, aims to ensure that resilience benefits not only visitors but also local communities, thereby building trust and long-term viability. This can be achieved through the active involvement of the population, for instance via participatory formats such as competitions, as well as through the expansion of cultural and tourism offers for residents.

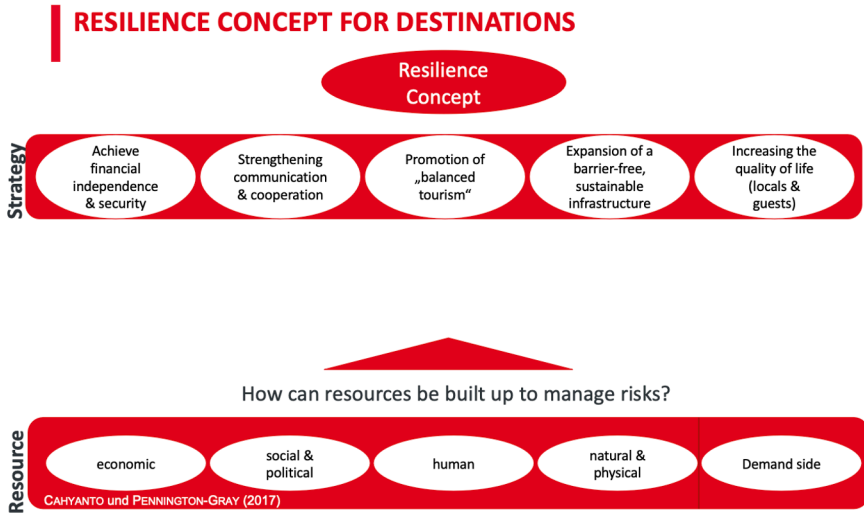


Fig. 3. Resilience Concept for Destinations (own figure 2025, based on Cahyanto and Pennington-Gray 2017)

This integrated approach highlights that resources alone are insufficient unless they are strategically mobilized. By linking resources with clear strategic priorities and concrete measures, destinations can proactively strengthen their resilience and improve their capacity to adapt to unforeseen challenges.

4 Conclusion and Critical Reflection

In conclusion, resilience in tourism destinations is not simply about preparing for the next crisis but about embedding a culture of adaptability and continuous learning. The Covid-19 pandemic and several other crises has highlighted both the vulnerability and the transformative potential of the sector. Destinations that succeed in integrating resilience thinking into their strategic planning will not only recover faster from shocks but will also gain long-term competitive advantages. However, the development of resilience concepts must be critically examined: an overemphasis on economic recovery may neglect social, ecological, and cultural dimensions of tourism. Therefore, resilience should be approached holistically, acknowledging the complexity of tourism systems and ensuring strategies are inclusive, sustainable, and forward-looking. The study conducted by the DHBW in the Black Forest National Park destination provided the basis for the resilience concept developed. Further research would be worthwhile to investigate whether this concept could also be useful in completely different crises in other regions of the world. This paper lays the groundwork with a theory-based foundation supplemented by empirical surveys.

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