

TOURES-NET

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Introduction

In recent years, system perspectives have received increasing attention within the tourism literature to deal with effects and impacts of stressors on the tourism industry. System perspectives offer a framework for analysing, responding, and adapting to the world's increasing complexity and uncertainty by investigating complex interactions between natural and societal processes. The concept of resilience is a main characteristic of complex systems and addresses the ability to cope, respond and adapt to disturbances and pressures.

The Himalayan region is one of the most popular tourist destinations worldwide with nature-based tourism in parks and protected areas being the most important tourism sector. Still, it also belongs to the world's fastest changing mountain region with many different drivers and challenges taking place such as migration, insertion into market economy and urbanization. Additionally, these developments often meet pressures and natural hazard processes with often vague future dynamics under conditions of global climate change. Thus, being able to anticipate, proactively cope with and recover from uncertainty and change finally represents a major step towards sustainable mountain development. On this account, the Austrian Academy of Sciences has approved the funding of the project "Resilience of tourism systems to natural hazards in the Himalayas" (touRES) (April 2017-April 2020).

The overall goal of this project is to a) identify the resilience of tourism enterprises to natural hazards in mountain regions based on two case studies in Nepal and b) to provide future development paths for tourism enterprises to enhance their resilience. One of the two case study regions is Mustang District in Annapurna Conservation Area in Western Nepal.

Resilience research must start with the question "resilience of what to what" to determine the temporal, social and spatial scales involved in the analysis. To do this, the project starts (1) to analyse the local, functional tourism system – consisting of actors, resources and their interlinkages -- of our two case study sites. This provides information on place and non-place-based system components and boundaries at the case study sites, which will directly be incorporated (2) to qualitatively investigate local event and effect portfolios of present and future natural hazards as well as institutional options and limitations for coping with these hazards. Results are integrated (3) to study tourism enterprises' resilience to natural hazards and to classify the enterprises based on their resilience. Finally, (4) a synthesis brings together a) the types of tourism enterprises based on their resilience, b) future local event and effect portfolios and c) scenarios of institutional options and limitations for coping with natural hazards. Based on this information, type-specific potential development paths towards improved resilience of tourism enterprises will be elaborated.

Anticipated scientific results of the project include the use of social-ecological network analysis in tourism systems; the development of local event and effect portfolios of past and future natural hazards and institutional constraints/options for coping with these hazard portfolios; the establishment of a conceptual framework of tourism enterprises' resilience; and the development of a method for classifying tourism enterprises based on their resilience to natural hazards.

Also, the project provides practical relevance by building local event and effect portfolios of future natural hazards. These portfolios form the basis for a participatory evaluation of potential development paths for improving tourism enterprises' resilience to natural hazards.

Besides ongoing research efforts in the existing project, Kathmandu University has joined hands with the Institute of Geography, University of Innsbruck to add another component to the project with the following objectives:

- A. to strengthen institutional capacities in existing local expertise concerning tourism studies and resilience research in Nepal (South-South network);
- B. to promote academic partnerships and networking between Austrian-Nepalese researchers (North-South network);
- C. to explore sustainable ways how to improve the transferability of research insights and experiences across different mountain contexts in Nepal in a practice-oriented way that considers mountain communities' context and social practices (e.g. by local radio, community workshops)
- D. to support local scholars/scientists in mountain communities in Nepal

Activities

Objective A and B:

Partners from Kathmandu University and the Institute of Geography/ University of Innsbruck will establish a tight Austrian-Nepalese research cooperation. A joint workshop will be organized by Kathmandu University and the Institute of Geography to share first research outcomes of the existing project with local stakeholders and research institutions in or close to the study region (e.g. Jomsom or Pokhara). The workshop will be organized by Kathmandu University and supported by the Institute of Geography/ University of Innsbruck. Based on the focus of touRES, the workshop topics focus on the intersection of tourism, natural hazards, and resilience of tourism enterprises to natural hazards. In a next step, the current institutional frameworks of natural hazards in Nepal are discussed with a strong emphasis on the elaboration and perception of the influence of protected areas' natural hazard resilience. This is followed by a discussion on the resilience of tourism enterprises towards natural hazards.

Objective C:

A meeting with local stakeholders in Mustang district will start the discussion on how to improve the transferability of research insights and experiences across different mountain contexts in Nepal in a practice-oriented way that considers mountain communities' context and social practices (e.g. by local radio, stakeholder workshops, best practice excursions).

Objective D:

The Institute of Geography and the Kathmandu University will organize a one-day guest lecture to support young scholars/scientists in mountain communities in Nepal. Innovative teaching methods and tools for efficient transfer of knowledge and skills will be applied to foster an open-minded dialogue and the exchange of innovative ideas. The methodological/empirical approach will build upon already achieved results of the touRES project. Depending on the participating students it will involve an introduction to academic methods and tools (e.g. GIS analysis and mapping, social-ecological network analysis).

Expected Outcomes

The expected outcomes of touRES-NET include:

- the intensification of the academic cooperation between the Institute of Geography and Kathmandu University;
- the implementation of a joint research workshop on tourism, the institutional dimension of natural hazards, and resilience of tourism enterprises in Kathmandu or Pokhara;
- the implementation of a one-day lecture/skill training for young scholars/scientists in Jomsom;- the identification of potential teaching opportunities (e.g. jointly supervised Master- and PhDtheses);
- the promotion of a permanent South-South dialogue between academics in Nepal to strengthen future cooperations;
- the identification of feasible possibilities how to improve the transferability of research insights and experiences across different mountain contexts.

In order to guarantee a successful dissemination of results, the workshop outcomes will be presented within the lecture programme of both partners (e.g. lecture series of the “IGG – Innsbrucker Geographische Gesellschaft”) or within local newspapers (e.g. “Tiroler Tageszeitung”, “Himalayan Times“, “Kathmandu Post”).

Project Schedule

The total project duration of touRES is scheduled for 36 months and funded by the Austrian Academy of Science, starting in April 2017.