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## **A Framework for Assessing the Economic Resilience of the Host Communities in Tourism Destinations: Literature Review**

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### **Abstract**

Tourism was Sri Lanka's third-largest foreign exchange earner in 2018, delivering multifaceted economic benefits from national to local levels. However, the country has faced frequent crises in recent years, including the Easter Sunday attacks in 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic crisis, and political instability. Within this context, the tourism industry's contributions have declined sharply, underscoring its high sensitivity to external shocks. Host communities represent the most influential stakeholders at the local level, directly managing tourism destinations. They are deeply engaged in tourism activities yet remain highly vulnerable to its fluctuations.

Economic resilience has emerged as a key topic in global and national discourses, with tourism policies increasingly addressing it. Nevertheless, a significant research gap persists in examining economic resilience at the local level, particularly among host populations. This study addresses this gap by developing a framework to assess the economic resilience of host communities in Sri Lanka's tourism destinations.

The literature review synthesized peer-reviewed journals on resilience, economic resilience, tourism resilience, host communities, and host communities in destinations. Drawing from this comprehensive review, an initial framework was constructed and refined through expert consultations to ensure contextual relevance. The final framework identifies key variables and indicators for evaluating host communities' economic resilience in Tourism Destinations. It enables empirical investigation of their resilience in Sri Lanka's tourism destinations, supports strategies to enhance it, and facilitates analysis of household economic conditions amid multiple crises.

**Keywords:** Crises, Host Community, Tourism Destinations, Economic Resilience

## 1.0 Background

Sri Lanka is one of the most popular tourism destinations in Asia and has one of the fastest-growing tourism industries in the region. The tourism sector is the country's third-largest foreign exchange earner and has generated multiple economic benefits, including foreign currency inflows, employment opportunities, new product development, and the creation of diverse livelihood opportunities. The industry was well prepared to welcome tourists and to satisfy them in order to meet its business objectives.

However, over the past few years Sri Lanka has faced a series of external and internal crises. As a result, tourist arrivals have fluctuated significantly, directly affecting the tourism industry, which is highly sensitive to such shocks. Crises are periods of intense uncertainty characterized by unpredictability and a loss of control over key functions of a system (Moreira, 2007). Aktas and Gunlu (2005) identify three core elements of a crisis: (a) a provocative component, whereby the crisis arises from an unexpected event or series of events occurring over a short period and having the potential to cause substantial change, challenging the existing structure or even the survival of the tourist destination; (b) threat and damage, where the triggering event is so significant in its impact that it may pose a short-term threat to business operations and to the destination as a whole; and (c) the need for urgent action, requiring rapid intervention and cooperation among the main authorities and stakeholders in the sector (cited in Vargas-Sánchez, 2018).

As Laws and Prideaux (2005, p.1) point out, “crises can occur at any level of operation including an individual restaurant or a local coach company, a destination, a region, nation or the global tourism industry.” Sri Lanka faced the easter attacks in 2019, and the COVID-19 pandemic subsequently emerged as an international crisis. As the virus spread rapidly across other countries, the government shortly decided to close the airports and simultaneously imposed travel restrictions to control the spread of the deadly virus (Arachchi and Gnanapala, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the entire supply chain of Sri Lankan tourism, and host communities in the destinations were directly affected. In the health crisis context, most of Sri Lanka's top ten source markets were severely hit by COVID-19 (Tripathi, Sharma and Pandya, 2022). Within this broader setting, Sri Lanka also experienced a severe national economic crisis. Inflation intensified in 2022, with headline inflation rising from an average of 5.9% in 2021 to 46.4%, driven by shortages of essential goods such as food, fuel, and cooking gas; higher energy prices; import restrictions; sharp currency depreciation; and substantial liquidity injections by the Central Bank. Economic crises affecting tourism include global recessions, weak national economies, and sudden exchange-rate fluctuations, all of which can reduce consumer confidence and decrease the propensity to travel. A loss equivalent to three months of global travel in 2020 alone could lead to job losses of between 12% and 14%, while the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) estimates a 20–30% decline in international tourist arrivals compared to 2019.

Tourism destinations are constructed around various attractions, which may be natural or man-made. Tourist centers are often located in coastal and beach areas, wooded regions, mountains, and river valleys, where the physical characteristics can heighten the risk of natural hazards. To operate tourism, multiple sub-sectors function within the destinations. Host communities are primarily responsible for tourism operations, since tourism differs from most other forms of trade in that it comprises a multiplicity of organisations and interests, with each tourist trip involving elements from various sub-sectors, including accommodation, food and beverage, transportation, entertainment, attractions, travel trade, festivals, events, conferences, and other tourism services. A decline in tourist arrivals due to prevailing security and political instability has been one of the greatest challenges to the tourism recovery process in Sri Lanka (GoSL, 2006).

Host communities are the main operators and service providers in tourism destinations and are directly affected by these crisis situations. When the tourism industry in Sri Lanka nearly collapsed, cities were locked down, airports were closed, and many travel restrictions were imposed. When destinations are effectively abandoned, the impact on host communities is immediate and severe. The pandemic has significantly affected the livelihoods of global citizens who depend heavily on tourism, and destination management organisations lacked prior experience and could not anticipate the strategies needed to overcome such a devastating situation.

In this context, resilience has emerged as a key contemporary concept, discussed in relation to climate change and various types of crises. Resilience is examined across multiple disciplines, but economic resilience specifically refers to the capacity of an economic system to respond to disturbances (shocks) by either recovering to its previous state or adapting to a new, more sustainable configuration (Dimitrios, 2022). Economic resilience is widely explored at national and regional levels, while a smaller body of research focuses on sector- and community-specific contexts such as fishery and agricultural communities. However, there remains a significant gap in research on tourism-driven communities, particularly in relation to multiple, overlapping crises. Therefore, Sri Lanka has experienced a series of shocks over recent years, this study aims to develop a framework to assess the economic resilience of host communities in tourism destinations.

This paper is structured into four main sections. The first section presents the literature review, which identifies key variables and indicators relevant to economic resilience. The second section outlines the methodology, detailing the scientific approach used to develop the research design. The third section discusses the framework developed, and the final section concludes the paper and offers recommendations.

## 2.0 Literature Review

### *Resilience*

Vulnerability, adaptation, and resilience are closely interrelated concepts. High vulnerability implies greater exposure to shocks, and vulnerability to shocks is determined by factors such as the degree of resource depletion, location, industrial structure, economic openness, and policy regime (Tan et al., 2017). Vulnerability is comprehensively defined as the quality or condition of being susceptible to being attacked or harmed, either physically or emotionally. In the social context, vulnerability is shaped by underlying socio-economic conditions, demographic and cultural characteristics, political structures, and the role of government and institutions (Adger, 2003).

Vulnerability is commonly illustrated through three core components: exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity. First, exposure refers to the extent to which a system is situated in harm's way. Second, sensitivity describes the degree to which the system is affected once exposed to a stressor. Third, adaptive capacity represents the system's ability to respond, adjust, and adapt to stress. Therefore, it is important to identify changes occurring within a city and to understand the adaptation mechanisms of the urban system. Building such capacity has become an essential investment in enhancing the resilience of cities. Adaptation can also generate positive outcomes for resilience and is critical for managing system resilience and long-term sustainability.

The concept of resilience has been employed across multiple academic disciplines, each offering slightly different definitions, but all emphasising the ability of a system to absorb, adapt to, and recover from change, stress, and shocks. The term "resilience" is expected to evolve and take on expanded meanings as it is further applied by practitioners and different fields (Amir et al., 2015). At the community level, resilience is understood as the capacity of a place its residents and supporting systems to maintain positive functional relationships in the face of significant disturbances, to resolve emerging problems, and to rebound from adversity with strengthened and more resourceful capabilities (Folke et al., 2002). Resilience can be discussed at micro, meso, and macro levels; however, this research focuses on the micro level, particularly the economic resilience of households within host communities.

The literature distinguishes two main types of resilience (Rose, 2004): (1) inherent resilience, which refers to the ability of a system to function under normal conditions for example, the capacity to substitute alternative inputs when some are curtailed by an external shock, or the ability of markets to reallocate resources in response to price signals; and (2) adaptive resilience, which emerges during crises and is driven by ingenuity or extra effort, such as increasing substitution possibilities within individual businesses or strengthening markets by improving information flows to connect suppliers without customers to customers without suppliers (Rose, 2004).

When a crisis occurs, people attempt to absorb and respond to the situation based on their existing capacities. This is often described as the immediate post-shock response. The levels of resilience and vulnerability are influenced by the three interconnected dimensions of exposure, sensitivity, and response and adaptation. To ensure the long-term sustainability of

resilience, it is necessary to strengthen adaptation capacity and, where appropriate, to transform or reorganise the system in ways that enhance its ability to recover. Shocks can disrupt household income and consumption flows, and the domestic unit is conceptualized as mediating a range of behaviours—such as labour-force participation, consumption patterns, and migration—that are themselves shaped by the particular composition of this basic economic entity (Schmink, 1984).

### ***Economic Resilience***

Economic resilience (ER), an operational application of resilience theory, is defined as the ability of an economy to respond to hazards and disturbances, including the inherent capacities that enable communities to avoid or minimize negative impacts (Rose, 2004). Originating from resilience theory, economic resilience is widely used in the economic literature to assess the ability and speed with which an economic system can recover from a disaster-related shock (Osth, Reggiani and Galiazzo, 2015; Rose and Krausmann, 2013). It is often described as the ability or capacity of a system to absorb or cushion itself against damage or loss.

In economic literature, the term has been used in at least three distinct senses with respect to the ability (a) to recover quickly from a shock (“shock-counteraction”), (b) to withstand the effects of a shock (“shock-absorption”), and (c) to avoid the shock altogether (Briguglio et al., 2009). This implies that, after a crisis, the community requires absorption capacity to respond to the shock, as well as adaptation capacity to manage the situation and recover from its effects. Adaptive capacity, in particular, refers to the ability to withstand changes in economic conditions while maintaining the community’s standard of living (Martin, 2012).

Building on these conceptual foundations, this research focuses on economic resilience within the tourism sector, with specific attention to host communities in tourism destinations. It examines how these communities absorb, adapt to, and recover from economic shocks, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of tourism-driven economic resilience at the household and community levels.

### ***Host Communities in Tourism Destinations***

A household can be defined either as a family or kinship unit (for example, the conjugal family) or as those who share a common residence, or as those who share a joint economic function such as consumption, production, investment, or ownership. According to Burns, the household is the strongest and most important economic institution healthy, stable, and growing (Schultz, 1984). In tourism destinations, host communities drive the system, and the majority of household income is derived from the tourism industry. Often, most members of these families are employed within the sector.

Following Chen and Dunn (1996), the household is viewed as one of several social units that shape production, consumption, and investment decisions. All such decisions depend on

household income, as well as on patterns of expenditure and accumulated wealth. Household production refers to the creation of goods and services by household members for their own consumption, using their own capital and unpaid labour. Examples include providing accommodation, preparing meals, laundering clothes, and caring for children (Ironmonger, 2001). As the smallest coherent economic unit, the household is highly sensitive to economic fluctuations, which directly affect income and overall welfare.

During crises, the tourism industry often contracts, which increases household vulnerability and reduces their capacity to absorb shocks. Economic resilience building therefore helps to reduce vulnerability and strengthen adaptation capacity, enabling households to sustain their existing livelihood systems. When risk levels rise, some households may become reluctant to remain in the tourism sector and may switch to alternative industries or migrate in search of more stable employment. Such shifts can undermine the tourism labour force and weaken destination competitiveness.

Given this, community engagement in tourism is essential, as host communities are the foundational operators and managers of tourism destinations. Tourism enterprises can be broadly categorised into four main supplier groups: accommodation; food and beverage services; transportation and excursion services; and crafts and shopping items (Gnanapala and Sandaruwani, 2016). Ensuring the resilience of household-level economic actors within these sub-sectors is therefore critical for the long-term sustainability of tourism-dependent destinations.

### ***Identified Variables and Indicators***

Resilience is a concept that incorporates two key components: (a) exposure to significant stressors or risks, and (b) the demonstration of competence and successful adaptation. Under this definition, resilience is understood as a dynamic set of processes rather than a fixed characteristic of an individual or system (Braverman, 2001). At the household level, resilience can be seen in the ways a household generates income, accumulates savings and assets, and meets its food and non-food needs.

Household structure can be divided into four broad categories: personal and household consumption; production activities and the division of labour; consumption activities and intra-household exchange; and patterns of power and authority within the household. Household expenditure is typically categorised into food and non-food components, with non-food expenditure including education, health, and other essential services. The Household Resilience Index (HHRI) is constructed so that the variables included in the questionnaire are carefully selected to measure the impact of economic-strengthening interventions on household assets, income, expenditure, and health outcomes (ACPHA, 2019).

In the tourism context, absorptive capacity refers to the ability of the local community to tolerate and adapt to the socio-economic and environmental impacts of tourism without suffering detrimental consequences (Saveriades, 2000). Integrating absorptive capacity with adaptive performance is essential for operationalising resilience theory in practice (Zhu et al., 2022; Jones and Comfort, 2020). Holling's adaptive cycle lies at the core of resilience theory,

describing an iterative process composed of four phases: growth and exploitation (r), conservation (K), collapse or release ( $\Omega$ ), and reorganisation ( $\alpha$ ) (Redman and Kinzig, 2003). Strengthening absorptive capacity and adaptive performance is therefore central to building resilience at the community and household levels (Salim et al., 2024).

Adaptive resilience refers to the ability to maintain or restore functionality during crises through ingenuity or extra effort, such as increasing the possibilities for input substitution in individual business operations or recontracting and strengthening markets by matching suppliers with customers (Rose and Adam, 2009). Adaptations are the concrete steps taken to achieve this. At the human-community level, resilience is defined as the capacity of a place—its residents and supporting systems to maintain positive functional relationships in the face of significant disturbances, resolve emerging problems, and rebound from adversity with strengthened and more resourceful capabilities (Folke et al., 2002).

Recent studies have further developed the measurement of resilience across different scales. Chen et al. (2019) explored the dimensions and measurement of city resilience using a multiple-case-study method, identifying key domains such as social resilience, economic resilience, community capital, institutional resilience, infrastructure resilience, and environmental resilience. Their findings suggest that infrastructure and institutional resilience are commonly emphasised in city-level resilience plans. Tan et al. (2017) developed a conceptual model and an indicator system for measuring the economic resilience of resource-based cities, grounded in evolutionary resilience theory and the concepts of persistence, adaptation, and transformation. Al-Maruf et al. (2021) examined household resilience to cyclones in coastal Bangladesh, identifying four dimensions: household infrastructure, household economic capital, household self-organisation and learning, and social safety nets. Cheng and Zhang (2020) constructed an index system for economic resilience and investigated whether tourism contributes to economic recovery after the Wenchuan earthquake shock. Cellini and Cuccia (2015) computed an index of economic resilience for the tourism sector in Italian regions, linking it to structural characteristics and regional strategies.

Overall, the ability of a household to absorb external changes and stress while maintaining the sustainability of its livelihood is central to resilience thinking (Lomboy et al., 2019). Based on this literature review, the present study develops a set of variables focusing on absorptive capacity and adaptive capacity, as outlined in the next section.

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>References</b>
<b>Absorptive Capacity</b>		
Income Stability	Household Income, Earnings, GDP, Per-capita income, Inflation rate, sectoral composition of local employment, Borrowings, Financial Revenue, Total retail sales of consumer goods, Total income from Tourism, Occupational Diversity,	(Cellini and Cuccia, 2015) , (Azzaz and Elshaer, 2024),( Lo et al., 2016), (Chen et al., 2019), (Hallegatte, 2014), (Cheng and Zhang, 2020)
Household Expenditure	Income Expenditure ratio, Expenditure, Financial expenditure, Mortgage/Rent	(Tan et al., 2017) , (Cheng and Zhang, 2020), (Chen et al., 2019)
Consumption Capacity	% of spending essentials (food, energy, rent or mortgage interest payments) , Food Intake / Loss of Foods, Access to food, Loss of Health, Loss of education, Loss of Education, Welfare Function	(Cheng and Zhang, 2020) , (Azzaz and Elshaer, 2024), (Hallegatte, 2014)
Social protection System	Social programme / Social protection System, Public sector Involvement	(Azzaz and Elshaer, 2024), (Hallegatte, 2014)
Financial Capital	Total investment in fixed assets, Total saving per capita, Credit Card, The existence of saving fund in the family, Percentage of emergency fund	(Cheng and Zhang, 2020), (Chen et al., 2019), (Briguglio et al., 2009), (Hallegatte, 2014), (Chen et al., 2019)
Household Wealth	Population owning home, Car ownership, Self-insurance	(Briguglio et al., 2009)
<b>Adaptive Capacity</b>		
Knowledge	Professional Inputs, Technical knowledge (Develop new Technology), Innovation, Skills,	(Zhang et al., 2022), (Li and Liu, 2022), (Jacobs et al., 2015), (Nelson et al 2010), (Grothmann and Patt 2005), (Cheng and Zhang, 2020), (Zhang et al., 2022), (Li and Liu, 2022), (Tan et al., 2017), (Cheng and Zhang, 2020)
Institutional Involvement	Supportive institutional environment, Diversified supply chain, Government management capacity	(Zhang et al., 2022), (Cheng and Zhang, 2020), (Greenham, Cox and Ryan-Collins, 2013), (Tan et al., 2017), (Jacobs et al., 2015), (Nelson et al 2010), (Tan et al., 2017), (Adger and Vincent, 2005), (Bohensky et al., 2010)
Social Capital	Social network / Networking, supportive financial systems, supporting personal capacities, developing trust, Ability to self-organise, Empowerment,	(Tan et al., 2017), (Adger and Vincent, 2005), Greenham, Cox and Ryan-Collins, 2013
Infrastructure	Service Infrastructure/ Tourism related Infrastructure	(Jacobs et al., 2015), (Nelson et al 2010) , (Tan et al., 2017)

*Source: Developed by Author based on Literature review: Table 1.0*

### **3.0 Methodology**

The methodology draws on established approaches to resilience measurement and tourism–community research, aligning with recent work on destination-level indices and community-resilience frameworks (Wang & Guo, 2023; Platania, 2023; Gardiner, 2019).

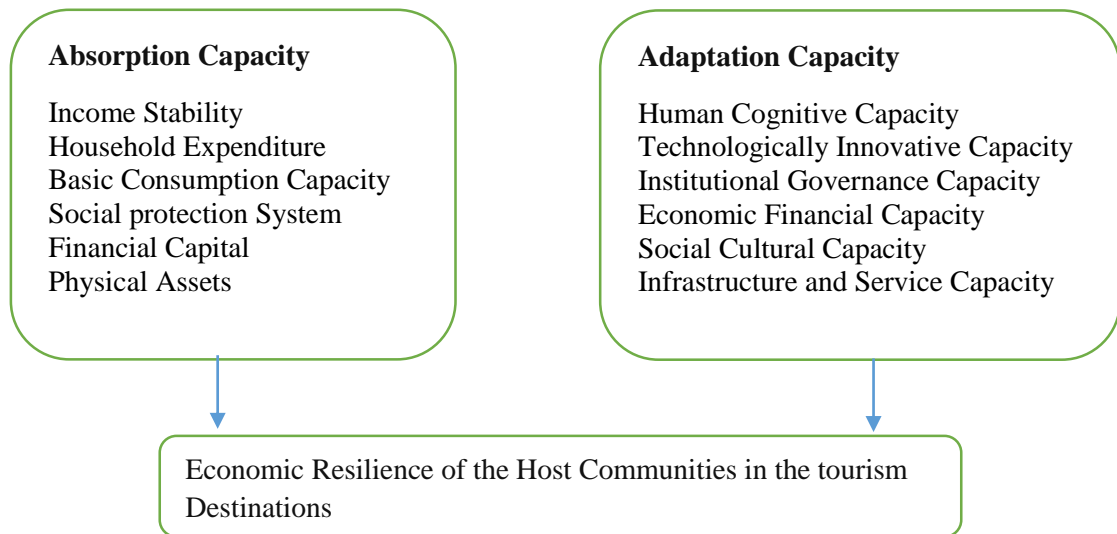
The research begins with a systematic literature review of peer-reviewed journal articles on resilience, economic resilience, tourism resilience, host communities, and host communities in destinations. Major databases such as Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar were searched using keywords including “economic resilience,” “tourism resilience,” “community resilience,” and “host community,” together with Boolean operators to ensure comprehensive coverage of both theoretical and empirical studies. The review followed a thematic synthesis approach (Fink, 2019; Sørensen et al., 2021), categorising studies by resilience dimensions (absorption and adaptation), scales (regional, local, destination, community, and household), and measures (income, Consumption, social capital, Capacity development and infrastructure).

From this synthesis, an initial conceptual framework was developed, specifying the dimensions, variables, and candidate indicators of economic resilience at the host-community level. The structure reflects the multilevel resilience literature, which emphasises economic, social, and institutional capital as core components of community resilience (Peacock et al., 2010; Gardiner, 2019). Each dimension was operationalised into measurable variables for example, income stability, livelihood diversification, asset ownership, access to credit, social networks, and institutional support following precedents in tourism-resilience and community-resilience studies (Platania, 2023; Vasvari & Gardiner, 2025).

The emerging framework was then refined through qualitative expert consultation. A purposive sample of academic and practitioner experts in tourism, regional economics, and community development was recruited, using criteria such as prior publications on resilience, tourism impacts, or livelihood studies. The process draws on established resilience-assessment guidelines that recommend iterative validation with domain experts to ensure construct validity and policy relevance (Futouris, 2022; OECD, 2025).

In summary, the methodology integrates a systematic literature synthesis, conceptual framework development, and expert-based validation to produce a contextually grounded framework for assessing the economic resilience of host communities in tourism destinations. This design ensures that the framework is both theoretically grounded in resilience and tourism-community literature and practically oriented toward future empirical application in destination-specific household or community surveys.

## Framework for Assessing the Economic Resilience



Source: Developed by Author: Figure 01

Based on the literature review and expert opinion, the framework presented above was finalized. The initial review identified six absorptive capacity variables and four adaptive capacity variables. However, following expert feedback and additional desk studies, some variables were renamed and several new variables were added to better reflect the empirical context. On this basis, the final version of the framework is presented as above, with the corresponding indicators included in Table 1.2.

### Finalized variables and Indicators

Variables	Indicators
<b>Absorption Capacity</b>	
Income Stability	Total Income, Household Per-capita income, Number of income Sources, Borrowings, Total income from Tourism and other
Household Expenditure	% of spending essentials (food, energy, rent) ,% of sending Loans, % Other payments (mortgage, interest payments)
Basic Consumption Capacity	Food Intake / Loss of Foods, Loss of Health, Loss of Education
Social protection System	Social programmes, Welfare Function, Institutional Involvement, Employment dependence, Social Networks, Self-insurance
Financial Capital	Total saving per capita, Credit Card, Percentage of emergency fund, The existence of saving fund in the family
Physical Assets	Owning Home, Owning Car, Owning Tourism Properties
<b>Adaptive Capacity</b>	
Human Cognitive Capacity	Skills, Knowledge, Supporting personal capacities, Experience
Technologically Innovative Capacity	Professional inputs, technical knowledge (Develop new technology), Innovation
Institutional Governance Capacity	Supportive institutional environment, Institutions, Government management capacity
Economic Financial Capacity	Supportive financial systems, Dependency

Social Cultural Capacity	Developing trust, Ability to self-organise, Cultural values, Community capacity
Infrastructure and Service Capacity	Tourism Service infrastructure, Physical Infrastructure

Source: Developed by Author: Table 01

## 4.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

The tourism industry is a highly sensitive sector that is directly exposed to external and internal crises. Over the past few years, Sri Lanka has experienced a series of national and international shocks, which have significantly affected most workers involved in tourism. Among them, host communities in tourism destinations are particularly vulnerable because of the abandonment and inadequate maintenance of destinations. When tourists stop arriving, direct income streams to these communities cease, and this has a direct impact on household welfare. This study therefore attempts to develop a framework to assess the economic resilience of households in such contexts.

Based on the literature review and validation through expert consultation, the framework has been finalized. The analysis identifies two core dimensions of economic resilience: absorptive capacity and adaptive capacity. Building on these capacities, six absorptive variables are specified: income stability, household expenditure, basic consumption capacity, social protection system, financial capital, and physical assets. In addition, six adaptive capacity variables are identified: human cognitive capacity, technologically innovative capacity, institutional governance capacity, economic and financial capacity, social and cultural capacity, and infrastructure and service capacity. This framework can be used to measure the economic resilience of host communities in tourism destinations.

The framework is further intended to be validated at selected destinations in order to refine and reshape it according to local conditions. It can also be applied to assess both the absorptive and adaptive capacities of host communities, enabling policymakers to design targeted interventions. Governments can use the framework to develop programmes from the national to the local level aimed at strengthening community resilience. Moreover, by identifying gaps in each adaptive capacity, authorities can priorities specific resilience-building initiatives. Finally, the framework offers a practical tool for local- and national-level decision-makers to understand the actual situation in tourism destinations and to design evidence based, context grounded economic resilience programmes.

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