Resilience and non-linear change in island tourism

Abstract:

Perhentian Kecil, located off the east coast of peninsular Malaysia, is predominantly a small-scale tourism destination, specifically for backpackers and independent travellers. Against the context of an aggressive drive by the state government to remove small-scale tourism development in favour of formal and high-end resorts, this paper examines the local responses to the exogenous factors that had threatened the equilibrium, and hence sustainability, of the tourism systems on the island. The paper draws upon a longitudinal study with multiple visits over an extended period since the mid-1990s. Using insights from Resilience Theory, the paper argues that this island destination is an example of non-linear change rather than conventional resort evolution. The paper also discusses how the authors - as researchers - had to realign their research framework and approach to take into consideration the growing complexities of tourism development in small island destinations.