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Beyond survival: a longitudinal study of organisational resilience in an urban destination

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a longitudinal, multi-scalar analysis of organisational resilience in urban tourism. Drawing on organisational ecology perspectives, it explores how political-ecological undercurrents and power asymmetries shape the adaptive trajectories of upscale hotels in the post-crisis business environment of Dhaka, a Global South megacity. A longitudinal qualitative study embedded temporal layering, iterative engagement, and evolving context as core components of its methodological architecture and followed 15 upscale hotels, four trade bodies and two government agencies across five phases (2020–2025). Document analysis and a hybrid inductive-deductive thematic analysis of forty-three interviews with senior executives, informed by organisational ecology and crisis governance, traced niche disruption, reconstruction and capability reconfiguration. An empirically grounded, temporally sensitive analysis reveals that urban upscale hotels diverged into distinct trajectories and emerged as both organisational survivors and infrastructural anchors of destination resilience, actively stabilising and reconfiguring tourism flows, markets, and urban space. However, fragmented governance and contested policy priorities produced uneven adaptive capacity, reinforcing market and spatial inequalities in recovery. The study advances an ecological-political account of resilience in urban tourism by demonstrating, longitudinally, how niche reconstruction unfolds under uneven governance conditions. It extends urban tourism resilience debates beyond cross-sectional ‘bounce-back’ narratives towards a temporally grounded understanding of how urban tourism systems are reconstituted through organisational adaptation and governance negotiation. Findings offer actionable insights for practitioners and policymakers in tourism cities, emphasising the need to reframe resilience as a strategic orientation, anchored in adaptive routines, diversified market portfolios, strategic risk management, and forward-looking governance.

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1. Introduction

Urban tourism is deeply embedded in the infrastructures, governance arrangements and economic rhythms of cities (Ashworth & Page, 2011). In cities, crises reverberate across mobility systems, labour markets and hospitality districts, reshaping the spatial and institutional foundations of the visitor economy (Brouder & Ioannides, 2014; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021). At a time of heightened vulnerabilities in urban destinations, the existential crisis tourism and hospitality businesses face is monumental (Pernecky & Faisal, 2023). As urban destinations confront increasingly frequent systemic shocks (Hall et al., 2018), diverse groups of stakeholders in tourism and hospitality pursue different objectives and co-create a complex and non-linear system that remains highly vulnerable to disruption. A holistic perspective on the actors and forces of the urban visitor economy is essential to recognise the inherent complexities in the spatial-temporal phenomenon of pandemic-induced crisis in the travel industry and ensure consistent and coherent responses across the tourism and hospitality industry. Brouder and Ioannides (2014) suggest that, in the context of urban areas, the change process needs to be analysed both at the regional and firm-level, focusing on the central actors and spatial forces in the region being studied. Urban hotels constitute core infrastructures of the

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urban visitor economy and function as both anchors and amplifiers of these dynamics, mediating the complex interplay of place, people, and economy that sustains the vitality of urban tourism and hospitality (Ashworth & Page, 2011; Faisal et al., 2020b; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021). Understanding their resilience, therefore, provides critical insight into the adaptive capacity of urban destinations.

The devastating impacts of COVID-19 on the urban visitor economy offered a unique opportunity to question how urban hospitality businesses anticipate and (re)adjust to the ripple effects of high-magnitude shocks in business environments. Despite a proliferation of post-COVID tourism resilience scholarship, much research remains cross-sectional or firm-centric, often privileging managerial agility over structural and governance conditions. To date, research on tourism crisis, resilience, and recovery post-COVID-19 has been broadly confined to exploring the potential 'transformation' of the tourism industry (such as Gössling et al., 2020; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020), which in turn necessitates several conditions to be met, including institutional responses from both demand and supply sides (Brouder, 2020; Pernecky & Faisal, 2023). These approaches risk underplaying the temporal and political dynamics through which adaptive capacity is produced unevenly within urban tourism systems. However, tourism resilience literature primarily emerged from comparatively stable Global North contexts, where institutional continuity, coordinated governance infrastructures, and relatively predictable regulatory environments are often implicitly assumed (Hall et al., 2018; Prayag et al., 2023). Such assumptions become less tenable in urban tourism systems characterised by fragmented governance, institutional asymmetry, and uneven access to adaptive resources. In these contexts, resilience cannot be adequately understood through managerial capability frameworks alone; it must also be interpreted in light of the political-economic conditions that selectively enable or constrain adaptation over time. In particular, there is a dearth of knowledge on how governance fragmentation and power asymmetries shape which actors can reconstruct niches and which become marginalised within tourism cities (Bramwell & Lane, 2011). This longitudinal study moves beyond a cross-sectional focus on the complex phenomenon of strategic crisis management in tourism and hospitality, examining how resilience unfolds as a temporally layered, politically mediated process shaped by uneven governance arrangements and structural constraints. It addresses the critical question regarding the stability and sensitivity of complex ecosystems of city hotels, specifically how upscale city hotels identify risks, absorb disturbances, interact with the urban business environment, withstand exogenous changes and recompose the urban visitor economy over time. In doing so, the study addresses a central tension in resilience scholarship between structural determinism and managerial agency, demonstrating that organisational trajectories are neither environmentally predetermined nor solely agent-driven, but emerge through relational interactions between institutional structures, resource endowments, and strategic action over time.

Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh, is a global city (Oxford Economics, 2025) and a megacity (United Nations, 2025) in South Asia. Industrial districts on the city fringe, alongside government offices, corporate headquarters, and diplomatic missions in the city centre, have spurred rapid urbanisation. This growth has resulted in a population approaching 40 million across a metropolitan area of 360 square kilometres. Upscale hotels in this economic hub of the country have traditionally relied on business travellers, making them more vulnerable to disruptions during crises. The first case of COVID-19 in Bangladesh was identified on 8 March 2020, and until 26 May 2020, the country reported 36,751 officially confirmed cases with 522 deaths (Johns Hopkins University, n.d.). The Government of Bangladesh imposed international travel restrictions from mid-March 2020 (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2020). Restrictions on public gatherings and the suspension of non-essential business operations resulted in the immediate closure of all restaurants, cafes, bars, and takeaways until further notice. Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) estimated a loss of BDT 970 million in revenue and 3,09,500 jobs in Bangladesh's hospitality industry (PATA, 2020). The Tourism Crisis Management Committee, headed by the government agency Bangladesh Tourism Board (BTB), was commissioned as the lead agency to coordinate the crisis response and recovery (BTB, 2020).

This qualitative study applies an evolutionary perspective and adopts the theoretical lens of organisational ecology to identify post-COVID-19 crises in upscale hotel business environments in Dhaka and explore insights into organisational responses to strategic risks in managing a crisis. Drawing on five years of longitudinal data (March 2020–April 2025), it provides key stakeholders' perspectives on and responses to crises in an urban visitor economy and captures the complexities of adaptive capacity and the evolution of upscale hotels amid environmental uncertainties, fragmentation, and variability. Critical insights from the

study make three key contributions to urban tourism and resilience scholarship. First, it reconceptualises resilience as *politically mediated selection*, demonstrating that organisational survival is shaped not only by environmental pressures but also by governance structures and institutional access. Second, it advances the concept of *path-dependent niche reconstruction*, showing how early adaptive responses condition long-term organisational trajectories. Third, it challenges crisis-as-transformation narratives by illustrating how crisis-induced adaptation may result in *selective consolidation and intensified market concentration*, rather than systemic transformation.

2. Literature review

2.1. Crisis management and resilience in urban tourism and hospitality

In urban centres, where socio-economic, infrastructural, and governance systems are deeply interconnected, the scale and intensity of tourism crises are significantly amplified (Ashworth & Page, 2011; Faisal et al., 2020b). Maxim and Morrison (2024) identified governance failures, lack of integrated planning, and inadequate stakeholder coordination as persistent vulnerabilities of urban destinations. Their findings substantiate earlier arguments by Jiang et al. (2019) for a paradigm shift in tourism crisis governance that includes collaborative foresight, distributed leadership, and anticipatory capacity. In this connection, a number of organisational characteristics found effective to represent a crisis resilient organisation such as quality of service, repeat and loyal customer, diversifying products and markets, financial strength, and ability to use technology (Aydoğan et al., 2024). Similarly, Schwaiger et al. (2022) reported that resilience in family hospitality businesses is largely determined by the combination of internal (e.g., individual's traits, employees' attitudes) and external (e.g., finances, networks, communication) factors. Taken together, these perspectives suggest that resilience in urban hospitality is both an organisational imperative and a governance challenge. Organisational resilience in the urban hospitality sector has systemic implications: it influences visitor perceptions, the spatial distribution of tourist activity, and the governance structures that sustain urban competitiveness (Faisal et al., 2020a; Maxim & Morrison, 2024; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021). As such, resilience in tourism is not merely the capacity to bounce back but encompasses a complex set of adaptive, absorptive, and transformative capabilities across individual, organisational, and systemic levels (Hall et al., 2018; Jiang et al., 2025). Nevertheless, tourism resilience scholarship continues to privilege organisational agility, innovation, and adaptive leadership while giving comparatively limited attention to how governance fragmentation, political mediation, and structural inequalities shape adaptive capacity unevenly across tourism systems. This tendency is particularly evident in contemporary resilience narratives that foreground recovery and transformation while under-examining the distributive consequences of crisis governance in urban tourism contexts.

Hannan and Freeman (1977) argue that adaptation is rare and costly; when significant changes occur, it is akin to the emergence of a new organisational form rather than evolution within the same entity. This aligns with Schumpeter's (1976) theory of creative destruction, which views crises as moments of discontinuity that enable the dismantling of outdated structures and the emergence of novel forms. Mitroff (2016) similarly argues that disruptive change offers fertile ground for innovation, provided that organisations possess the strategic foresight and structural agility to respond. While much of the resilience literature focuses on structural and strategic dimensions, recent scholarship has introduced more philosophical and temporal perspectives. Pernecky and Faisal (2023) advance the notion of pragmatic hope as a guiding ethos for tourism in times of heightened vulnerability. Unlike naive optimism, pragmatic hope recognises the depth of crisis while advocating for purposeful engagement, innovation, and transformation. This perspective aligns with Crossley's (2020) call to attend to temporality in tourism research. Resilience should be understood not as a singular event but as an evolutionary process that unfolds across time, shaped by memory, anticipation, and iterative adaptation.

Recent scholarship on tourism and hospitality resilience has expanded significantly in the post-COVID-19 context, emphasising adaptive capacity, system transformation, and multi-scalar governance as central to resilience-building processes (Bartelet et al., 2026; Fan et al., 2025). For instance, Fan et al. (2025) note the role of creativity, stakeholder collaboration and digitalisation in reinforcing tourism systems against future shocks. More broadly, from a comparative perspective on South and Southeast Asia, Bhati et al. (2016) illustrate how

destination-level resilience can be constructed through institutional arrangements or disaster governance frameworks that require both context sensitivity and regionally informed urban tourism and hospitality resilience models. The COVID-19 pandemic emerged as a paradigmatic case of a high-magnitude crisis that disrupted the urban visitor economy. Pandemic disruptions exposed the vulnerabilities of Global South cities where tourism resilience depends heavily on institutional coordination and adaptive innovation among core urban actors, particularly hotels (Jiang et al., 2025; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021). Examining these dynamics thus advances the understanding of resilience as both an organisational and urban phenomenon.

2.2. Organisational ecology and longitudinal changes

Faulkner (2001) proposed one of the earliest frameworks for tourism crisis management, positing that crises differ from disasters in their potential for proactive mitigation and adaptive management. Ritchie (2009) expanded this view by framing crises as socially constructed phenomena that are shaped by organisational preparedness, stakeholder perceptions, and governance failures. An emerging strand of research fuses ecological perspectives with institutional theory and strategic management, countering deterministic critiques by foregrounding organisations' adaptive capacities to anticipate, negotiate, and transform in response to environmental shifts. Lounsbury and Beckman (2015) illustrate the vibrancy of contemporary organisation theory, suggesting the coexistence of population ecology with identity work, sensemaking, and institutional entrepreneurship as a productive yet contested integration that unsettles clear boundaries between structural and agentic accounts of organisational change.

In tourism contexts, Hjalager's (2000) work signals the potential of combining ecological models with labour market and human capital perspectives, while Ingram and Baum (1997) highlight the intersection between ecological dynamics and resource-based views of competitive advantage. The theoretical lens of organisational ecology provides a critical framework for understanding how tourism and hospitality firms evolve in response to environmental conditions and selection pressures (Faisal et al., 2020a; Hjalager, 2000; Ingram & Baum, 1997). Core to organisational ecology is the concept of the niche, defined as the set of environmental conditions under which an organisation can survive and thrive. As a distinct paradigm in organisational theory, drawing heavily on analogies from biological ecology to explain the founding, growth, adaptation, and mortality of organisations, organisational ecology posits that organisations operate within ecosystems characterised by competition, variation, selection, and retention (Hannan & Freeman, 1989).

Organisational ecology's strength lies in its methodological emphasis on longitudinal, population-level data; *'the use of longitudinal data enables the mechanisms and processes governing the establishment, growth, change and decline of these organisations to be identified'* (Hjalager, 2000, p. 271). Central to this approach is the organisation-level perspective, which posits that environmental selection processes play a more decisive role than managerial adaptation in determining organisational survival. Existing studies on urban tourism resilience often rely on cross-sectional designs and post-crisis assessments, overlooking the temporal dynamics through which resilience unfolds.

This study offers a multi-scalar longitudinal perspective that traces how hotels negotiate evolving urban political-economic conditions over time. Longitudinal qualitative research (LQR) offers a methodological avenue for capturing this complexity. Hermanowicz (2013) positions LQR as a means to trace how individuals and organisations reinterpret experiences over time, revealing patterns of continuity and change. Decrop (2010) and Nunkoo et al. (2013) apply this logic to tourism studies, emphasising the value of inductive case-based approaches to uncovering evolving strategies, norms, and behaviours. At the community level, Dahles and Susilowati (2015) conducted a study taking multiple crisis events into consideration spanning over a decade and claimed resilience of small-scale tourism businesses as a reactive response, aligning with alternative livelihood strategies. At the organisational level, Ingram and Baum's (1997) historical study of Manhattan hotels (1898–1980) demonstrated that chain affiliation reduced failure rates, particularly for newer and smaller establishments, highlighting interdependence and resource sharing as buffers against environmental pressures. Hjalager (2000) applied the model to the Danish restaurant sector, revealing that enterprise age, size, and affiliation have a significant impact on survival rates. For policymakers, these insights unsettle simplistic prescriptions that privilege managerial

upskilling, showing that structural conditions and network affiliations often play a more critical role in survival (Hjalager, 2000; Ingram & Baum, 1997).

Ecological models risk becoming reductive if detached from the socio-political settings in which organisations operate (Faisal, 2020b); integrating them with resilience and adaptive governance offers a more robust foundation for explaining how urban hospitality businesses adjust to regulatory change, shifting demand, and crisis conditions. ‘Methods such as survival/event history analysis can be applied’ (Brouder & Eriksson, 2013, p. 383) to show how inherited practices affect a firm’s performance. However, there is a lack of empirical engagement with questions about how hospitality businesses in an urban destination interact with the environment and survive endogenous and exogenous changes to the visitor economy. Faisal et al. (2020a) introduced the concept of niche reconstruction to capture how organisations renegotiate their legitimacy, stakeholder alignments, and resource dependencies during crises in urban destinations. This perspective is particularly salient for urban upscale hotels, which operate within dense networks of suppliers, clients, and regulators. Their survival is not merely a function of internal capabilities but is contingent upon how effectively they reconstruct their niche amidst systemic volatility.

2.3. Theoretical tension: structure, agency, and resilience

Resilience scholarship in tourism continues to grapple with an unresolved tension between structural determinism and organisational agency. Organisational ecology foregrounds environmental selection, positing that organisational survival is largely shaped by structural conditions and competitive pressures (Hannan & Freeman, 1989). Conversely, resilience and crisis management literature emphasises managerial agency, adaptability, and innovation as central to recovery and transformation (Prayag et al., 2023). This divergence generates conceptual ambiguity within urban tourism research, where organisations are alternately depicted as constrained by external environments or as proactive agents capable of strategic adaptation.

Despite this growing body of work, there remains a paucity of empirical research on how this tension between structural selection and organisational agency unfolds over time within urban tourism systems, particularly in Global South contexts characterised by governance fragmentation and institutional asymmetry. Addressing this gap, the present study conceptualises resilience as an ecological–relational process, in which environmental selection pressures are mediated through governance structures and enacted over time through organisational strategies. In doing so, it traces how resilience emerges as a temporally layered and politically mediated process within evolving urban tourism systems. In this regard, the study moves beyond deterministic and voluntarist accounts of resilience by conceptualising organisational adaptation as an emergent outcome of interactions between governance structures, institutional embeddedness, resource asymmetries, and temporally unfolding strategic action.

3. Methodology

Crossley (2020) emphasises the methodological value of attending to temporality and continuity in tourism research; longitudinal qualitative research (LQR) is particularly valuable in tourism studies for its capacity to examine how attitudes, strategies, and practices evolve over time (Decrop, 2010; Nunkoo et al., 2013). This study adopts a longitudinal qualitative multiple-case study design to explore how upscale city hotels in Dhaka responded to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and prolonged uncertainties over a five-year period (2020–2025). Drawing from Hermanowicz (2013), this research embeds temporal layering, iterative engagement, and evolving context as core components of its methodological architecture. A multiple-case study design (Yin, 2018) examines strategic responses across fifteen hotels, four trade bodies, and two government agencies, illuminating both variations and commonalities in organisational trajectories under shared macro-level shocks.

In urban tourism contexts, this study integrates three analytical strands: i) organisational ecology provides the evolutionary logic of niche collapse, variation, selection and retention (Faisal et al., 2020b; Hannan & Freeman, 1989; Hjalager, 2000); ii) crisis governance introduces the political-ecological dimension acknowledging that selection pressures are mediated through regulatory regimes, stimulus allocation and stakeholder coordination (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Hall et al., 2018); and iii) resilience-as-becoming

foregrounds temporality, conceptualising resilience as an unfolding process of adaptive learning and capability reconfiguration rather than a discrete outcome (Folke, 2016; Prayag et al., 2023).

Findings stem from longitudinal interviews (conducted between May 2020 and April 2025) and analysis of industry reports and policy documents on hospitality and tourism crisis and recovery in Bangladesh (published between March 2020 and April 2025). The study engaged with and interviewed key actors (listed in Table 1), including forty-three research participants from 15 upscale city hotels in Dhaka, 4 trade bodies in tourism and hospitality, and 2 government agencies responsible for tourism policy, governance, and COVID-19 crisis recovery in Bangladesh. Participants were senior executives of the respective organisations. The longitudinal design enabled sustained engagement with participants, allowing emerging interpretations to be revisited across multiple phases and enhancing the credibility and temporal depth of the findings. The research adhered to the ethical principles, including informed and voluntary consent, protection of privacy and confidentiality, and respect for participants' social and cultural contexts. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any stage. All interviews were conducted with informed consent and anonymised to protect participants' identities.

To access the knowledge and experience of the research participants and elicit their realities and subjective perceptions (Faisal, 2024), semi-structured in-depth interviews were guided by an inventory of the issues being investigated. Given the intensity and duration of engagement, ethical sensitivity extended beyond procedural compliance to embrace relational ethics. This included building trust, sustaining respectful interactions, and engaging in reflective dialogue, consistent with the ethos of longitudinal qualitative research (Hermanowicz, 2013). A purposive sampling strategy (Faisal, 2024) ensured heterogeneity in ownership structures, organisational scale, service models, and market orientations. This approach aligns with Decrop's (2010) guidance on inductive case selection in longitudinal tourism research and supports the identification of dynamic organisational patterns. Research participants' positions, as the senior executives, provided a vantage point into organisational priorities, adaptation logics, and internal-external negotiations. Rantatalo and Karp's (2016) ethnographic work on collective reflection resonates with this study's findings: over time, managers became not just informants but co-reflective practitioners, using interviews as a space to articulate and reframe their crisis responses.

Interviews were conducted across five distinct waves corresponding to the five analytical phases, with interviews undertaken at approximately 6–12 month intervals: i) prodromal and acute (March–June 2020); ii) adaptive experimentation (July 2020–February 2021); iii) market reconfiguration (March 2021–June 2022); iv) strategic diversification (July 2022–December 2023); and v) resilience consolidation (January 2024–April 2025). This iterative engagement mirrors Hermanowicz's (2013) approach to longitudinal qualitative interviewing, focusing on consistency in relationships and continuity in themes while

Table 1. Research participants.

Organisations	Type of organisation	Participants	Position of participants
B1	Hotel Business	P1	Executive Director
B2	Hotel Business	P2, P39, P43	General Manager
B3	Hotel Business	P3, P22, P34*	General Manager, Hotel Manager*
B4	Hotel Business	P4	General Manager
B5	Hotel Business	P5, P40	Head of Operations
B6	Hotel Business	P8, P23, P33	General Manager
B7	Hotel Business	P9, P24, P36	General Manager
B8	Hotel Business	P10, P25, P37	Head of Sales
B9	Hotel Business	P11, P30, P38	Director of Sales and Marketing
B10	Hotel Business	P12, P29	General Manager
B11	Hotel Business	P15	Chief Executive Officer
B12	Hotel Business	P16, P32	General Manager
B13	Hotel Business	P19, P42*	Chief Executive Officer, General Manager*
B14	Hotel Business	P20	Managing Director
B15	Hotel Business	P18	Managing Director
T1	Trade Body	P6, P26	President
T2	Trade Body	P14, P27	President
T3	Trade Body	P7	General Secretary
T4	Trade Body	P21	President
G1	Government Agency	P13, P31	Chief Executive Officer
G2	Government Agency	P17, P28, P35, P41	Chairman

*In both cases, the latter position had taken over the earlier position with the same authority.

allowing for emergent shifts. It also echoes Rantatalo and Karp's (2016) emphasis on collective reflection in practice, where longitudinal interactions deepen interpretive trust and reflexivity among participants. While a core set of participants was retained, some turnover occurred due to organisational changes; continuity was maintained by interviewing successor representatives within the same organisations. Each departing participant facilitated contact between the researchers and their successors, transferring relevant study details and progress. This approach ensured both longitudinal consistency and contextual responsiveness. As a result, the total number of research participants reached 43, representing 21 organisations, including 15 hotels (listed in Table 1).

Leadership and governance networks in tourism undergo profound transformations during systemic crises, often revealed in both formal policy discourse and informal stakeholder practices (Faisal et al., 2020a). The study analysed publicly available documents (published between March 2020 and April 2025) from Bangladesh Tourism Board, Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation, Bangladesh International Hotel Association, Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) and World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC). These documents provided a macro-institutional backdrop to the micro-strategic responses by hotels.

The analysis extensively engaged with the interview dataset, examining inferred and embedded meanings (Faisal, 2024). A hybrid inductive-deductive thematic approach, integrating pre-identified codes from crisis management, resilience and organisational ecology literature, identified emergent codes from interview data across five phases (illustrated in Table 2). The identification of themes, sub-themes, and corresponding codes ensured coherence in reporting findings across the temporal matrix and enabled tracing of strategic pivots, emerging priorities, and capability-building trajectories. This process is akin to the longitudinal sense-making framework advocated by Thelen et al. (2020), which captures how stakeholder perceptions and strategies evolve through iterative negotiation.

Hotels were categorised into three clusters according to their prevailing response patterns: Proactive Innovators, who rapidly adopted digital tools, diversified revenue streams, and actively engaged stakeholders; Adaptive Followers, who implemented changes reactively, often in response to emerging industry practices; and Reactive Retrenchers, who prioritised cost containment and minimised risk-taking. These organisational typologies were identified through a systematic process of cross-case comparison. The categories were not predetermined but emerged through iterative coding and pattern matching across cases and phases. Consequently, they represent the dominant strategic orientations consistently observed in the data and serve as analytical constructs for theorising variation in resilience trajectories. This typological differentiation provides a more nuanced understanding of how configurations of leadership, organisational capabilities, and institutional embeddedness influence resilience outcomes over time, highlighting the significance of context-specific longitudinal dynamics in tourism research (Decrop, 2010; Faisal, 2024; Nunkoo et al., 2013).

4. Findings and discussion

Findings of this study unsettle normative assertions that crises inherently serve as catalysts for systemic transformation in tourism (Brouder, 2020; Gössling et al., 2020). In contrast to the transformative expectations advanced in prior accounts, the empirical evidence from Dhaka indicates that organisational responses were predominantly characterised by adaptive reconfiguration and the accretion of existing structures. These dynamics challenge the generalisability of claims that crises inherently catalyse profound structural change, suggesting instead that crisis-induced change may reinforce, rather than disrupt, prevailing institutional and market arrangements.

Across five years, upscale hotels in Dhaka did not merely adapt to crisis conditions but actively reshaped tourism markets, spatial use, and governance relationships. While pandemic-induced niches such as hybrid events, domestic leisure, and medical tourism became enduring market conditions, their institutionalisation was not the product of collective transformation towards sustainability or justice, but of uneven access to resources, political capital, and elite-biased governance networks. This finding corroborates critiques of crisis governance as selective and exclusionary (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Faisal et al., 2020b), challenging optimistic narratives that crises inherently yield equitable or sustainable futures. Instead, resilience in Dhaka's tourism and

Table 2. Mapping themes and codes across five phases.

Phases	Themes	Sub-themes	Exemplary Codes
Phase I: Prodromal and Acute (March 2020–June 2020)	Niche Disruption and Early Reconstruction Signals	Abrupt shock Collapse of the traditional Market	Unprecedented halt, lockdown, travel restrictions, standstill Inbound dependency, corporate client base, travel restrictions, sharp decline in occupancy
		Proactive exploration of opportunities	Quarantine contracts, long-stay corporate clients, contactless service models
Phase II: Adaptive Experimentation (July 2020–February 2021)	Capability Strains and Governance Underpinnings	Repetitive patterns in early responses	Typical reactions, Cost minimisation, suspending non- essential operations
		'Wait and see' approach	Following competitors, calculative approach, temporarily
Phase III: Market Reconfiguration (Marh 2021–June 2022)	Niche Disruption and Early Reconstruction Signals	Defensive downsizing	Cost-cutting, layoffs, closing operations.
		Careful transition	Ease of domestic restrictions, Health and safety protocol, adopting technology, partial resumption
Phase IV: Strategic Diversification (July 2022–December 2023)	Capability Strains and Governance Underpinnings	Targeting new segments	Domestic affluents, urban staycations, luxury packages, diaspora travellers, MICE
		Proactive re- branding	Safe hospitality, assurance for modern technology
Phase V: Resilience Consolidation (January 2024–April 2025)	Niche Disruption and Early Reconstruction Signals	Sustained restrictions	Inbound travel restrictions, ban on large-scale gatherings
		Capability reconfiguration	Investing in sanitation technology, staff re-training, regular inspection, operational agility
Phase I: Prodromal and Acute (March 2020–June 2020)	Capability Strains and Governance Underpinnings	Uneven governmental response	Inconsistent policy communication, questionable support
		Rebound drive	Vaccination momentum, multi-segment approach, aggressive marketing, investing in technology
Phase II: Adaptive Experimentation (July 2020–February 2021)	Niche Disruption and Early Reconstruction Signals	Altered demand composition	Fragmented return, Hybrid MICE, Domestic elite leisure, long- stay expatriates
		Creativity and adaptability at the core	Exploring new markets, acclimatising to the changed situation, integrated capability management, intensive training
Phase III: Market Reconfiguration (Marh 2021–June 2022)	Capability Strains and Governance Underpinnings	Skill gap	Vacuum due to expert departure, multi-tasking ability, serving health-safety cautious customers, digital marketing ability
		Policy-market disparities	Inbound travel dilemma, Advocacy, trade body, questionable governance
Phase IV: Strategic Diversification (July 2022–December 2023)	Niche Disruption and Early Reconstruction Signals	Polycrisis	New virus variants, inflation, global supply chain disruption, geopolitical uncertainty
		Portfolio diversification	Additional revenue streams, food delivery, subscription- based services, space rentals, strategic partnerships
Phase V: Resilience Consolidation (January 2024–April 2025)	Capability Strains and Governance Underpinnings	Reality-driven restructuring	Product- market diversification, budgetary realignment, staff retention, long-term orientation
		Financial resilience	Inflation, global environmental uncertainty, asymmetric niche benefits, continued innovation
Phase I: Prodromal and Acute (March 2020–June 2020)	Niche Disruption and Early Reconstruction Signals	Slow recovery	Prolonged uncertainty; multifaced issues; bumpy ride
		Exclusion	Benefit leakage, power dominance, large Vs small business, policy breakdown, advocacy
Phase II: Adaptive Experimentation (July 2020–February 2021)	Capability Strains and Governance Underpinnings	Redefined reality	Shifted domination, altered competitive positioning, diverse niches
		Future-ready approach	Regional travel, medical tourism, strategic partnerships, changed mindset
Phase III: Market Reconfiguration (Marh 2021–June 2022)	Niche Disruption and Early Reconstruction Signals	Formalised crisis management	Lessons learned, permanent resilience team, cross- departmental coordination
		Diversification challenge	Portfolio management, sustaining limited alternatives, talent challenge
Phase IV: Strategic Diversification (July 2022–December 2023)	Capability Strains and Governance Underpinnings	Persistent external shocks	Inflationary pressures, currency fluctuations, global economic turbulence

hospitality sector was consolidated through pragmatic diversification and institutional bricolage, often entrenching rather than dismantling power asymmetries.

4.1. Adaptive challenges and evolutionary responses

Phase I (Prodromal and Acute) reveals the initial convergence of ecological collapse and organisational triage, with limited strategic differentiation among hotels (Schwaiger et al., 2022). This phase marked the

collapse of Dhaka's pre-pandemic tourism niche, which had been heavily dependent on international corporate travel. While Proactive Innovators planted early seeds of niche reconstruction, the sector was still in a reactive mode, dominated by survival imperatives. This set the baseline from which longitudinal trajectories and typological divergence would unfold in subsequent phases. Within days of the government's imposition of international travel restrictions and suspension of domestic flights, the visitor economy in Dhaka entered what P1 of B1 explained as a *'standstill'*. Pre-pandemic occupancy rates averaging 60–75% and robust ADRs (Average Daily Rates) in the US\$170–260 range collapsed to single digits. A general manager described the magnitude of this collapse as *'nothing compared to anything we've faced before . . . not even 5% of this'* (P12 of B10). Another reflected on the drastic change *'It felt like someone pulled the plug on the entire industry. One week we were discussing expansion; the next, we were figuring out how to keep the lights on'* (P19 of B13). From an organisational ecology perspective, the pandemic triggered a systemic shock that invalidated the prevailing *'niche'* of the upscale hotel market, which had been heavily reliant on inbound corporate travellers (P2 of B2; P5 of B5; P8 of B6; P12 of B10; P19 of B13; P18 of B15). P2 of B2 noted *'Ninety-five percent of our guests are business travellers . . . they stopped coming. The pie was full of corporate travellers—and suddenly, there was no pie'*.

The collapse of international mobility dismantled the ecological equilibrium underpinning Dhaka's upscale hospitality niche. Trade bodies and government agencies corroborated the severity of this niche collapse. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of a government agency noted, *'Most five-star hotels are now closed . . . from where will the guests come? The whole world is in the same problem'* (P13 of G1). The general secretary of an International Trade Body's Bangladesh Chapter further emphasised, *'Aviation and hotel industries do not have any business due to flight restrictions . . . until the business is back to normal no one will receive direct income'* (P7 of T3). Across the sector, variation in early responses was limited, reflecting both the magnitude of the external shock and the shared dependency on international markets. Initial actions centred on cost containment, suspension of non-essential operations, and compliance with evolving health protocols (P1 of B1; P3 of B3; P8 of B6; P10 of B8; P11 of B9; P16 of B12; P6 of T1; P7 of T3). Niche reconstruction efforts from hotels were to leverage institutional ties or location advantages; proximity to the airport became a valuable differentiator for properties courting airline crew and transit passengers (P1 of B1). Proactive Innovators began exploring emergent opportunities such as quarantine contracts with airlines, conversion of room blocks for long-stay corporate clients, and early adoption of contactless service models. Managing Director of a hotel secured an airline crew contract within two weeks of the lockdown, noting *'Being the safest hotel in the country gave us leverage to create demand'* (P20 of B14). Adaptive Followers, by contrast, adopted a *'wait-and-see'* approach, monitoring competitor moves before implementing similar strategies. This reactive posture often resulted in slower uptake of potential revenue streams, with one property manager admitting, *'We thought it would be a short-term pause . . . and then we'd be back to normal'* (P9 of B7). Reactive Retrenchers focused almost exclusively on cost-cutting, including furloughing staff, deferring maintenance, and closing F&B outlets. P5 of B5 explained, *'We went into hibernation mode. The priority was survival, not innovation'* (P5 of B5). Uncertainties around policy implementation compounded operational anxiety (P7 of T3; P21 of T4). P21 of T4 noted, *'The government's role will decide whether we keep our skilled employees'* (P21 of T4).

Findings emerged from Phase I reinforce the literature's characterisation of crises as both disruptive shocks and structural changes in organisational ecology (Hannan & Freeman, 1989; Ingram & Baum, 1997). In Dhaka's context, political-ecological constraints, such as contested access to stimulus and dependence on government–industry mediation, delayed the emergence of differentiated strategic responses. Furthermore, the governance underpinnings observed here echo elite bias in tourism crisis interventions (Faisal et al., 2020a). Access to government stimulus, such as the BDT 9.6 billion package for tourism, became a contested governance space (BTB, 2020; PATA, 2020). Selection pressures, therefore, did not operate as neutral market processes alone but were mediated through regulatory discretion, uneven access to financial relief, differential embeddedness within government–industry networks, and varying capacities to mobilise institutional influence during periods of acute uncertainty. Trade bodies advocated for direct subsidies or exclusive funds, warning that bank-mediated loans risked excluding smaller operators and diverting benefits to *'the big fish'* (P6 of T1; P21 of T4). Their emphasis on protecting large firms reveals how crisis governance can entrench pre-existing power asymmetries, limiting the sector's collective adaptive capacity. Consistent with Hall et al. (2018), the sudden collapse

of the pre-pandemic niche demonstrates that upscale hospitality in emerging urban economies is acutely vulnerable to exogenous shocks that sever international mobility chains. The initial convergence on defensive cost-cutting and operational retrenchment aligns with Faulkner's (2001) 'emergency' stage of crisis management, yet the rapid institutionalisation of health protocols and targeted niche experiments among Proactive Innovators suggests a compressed transition into adaptive variation. From a resilience-as-becoming lens (Folke, 2016; Prayag et al., 2023), the reluctance of Adaptive Followers and Reactive Retrenchers to engage in experimentation reveals both capability gaps and cognitive inertia. This contrasts with OECD-context examples, where even resource-constrained operators leveraged informal networks to pivot quickly (Hjalager, 2000). In Dhaka, however, adaptive flexibility was more unevenly distributed and closely tied to governance networks, institutional brokerage, and political-economic positioning within the urban tourism system.

Phase II (Adaptive Experimentation) represents the variation stage with multiple new forms tested against the altered environment (Hannan & Freeman, 1989). This phase exemplifies the variation-selection-retention cycle in organisational ecology. The visible differentiation in capabilities and market orientation among the three typologies suggests that the pandemic was acting as a selection pressure, rewarding those who could reconceptualise safety as value. The political-ecological undercurrents in Phase II reveal that crisis governance was not purely regulatory but also market-shaping. However, political-ecological constraints, especially fragmented governance, continued to limit strategic coherence. Hotels that secured government events benefited from a closed feedback loop between public policy and market survival, aligning with Bramwell and Lane's (2011) critique of governance networks as potential sites of selective advantage. Importantly, the emergence of domestic MICE and elite leisure niches challenges the mono-niche dependency observed in Phase I. However, the uneven uptake of hybridisation and safety branding suggests that ecological restructuring was still partial and contingent on resource endowments. Resilience-as-becoming is evident in the proactive embrace of domestic and hybrid event niches, illustrating the capacity to reframe market identity under constraint (Prayag et al., 2023); the proactive framing of hygiene as a competitive advantage represents an early form of transformative adaptation, moving beyond compliance to capability-driven niche creation (Faisal et al., 2020a). These firm-level adaptations signify more than managerial agility; they constitute processes of tourism resilience (Brouder & Ioannides, 2014; Hall et al., 2018). The adaptive strategies of Dhaka's hotels, such as hybridisation, diversification, and collaborative governance, reconfigured the city's visitor economy and altered its tourism landscape. This resonates with Hall et al.'s (2018) argument that crises can catalyse long-term competitiveness if capabilities are deliberately cultivated during turbulence. Resilience in urban tourism, therefore, is co-produced through micro-level organisational adaptations and macro-level urban governance responses.

4.2. Capability strains and strategic diversification

By 2022, Dhaka's upscale hotels entered Phase III (Market Reconfiguration). Phases II and III marked the emergence of new tourism niches that restructured Dhaka's visitor economy. The arrival of COVID-19 vaccines in Bangladesh in early 2021 created a cautious optimism across Dhaka's upscale hotel sector. In March 2021, vaccination drives targeting frontline workers, hospitality staff, and vulnerable populations were underway. Trade bodies lobbied to ease inbound restrictions for vaccinated travellers, framing upscale hotels as quarantine-ready partners in controlled entry protocols. The vaccine rollout exposed disparities in policy-market alignment. While some ministries supported targeted reopening, others maintained conservative restrictions. Governance dynamics shifted towards advocacy for structural reforms: visa facilitation, improved air connectivity, and integrated tourism marketing. Trade bodies played a critical mediation role, pushing for a 'green lane' policy for fully vaccinated travellers and advocating for recognition of hotel-based quarantine as a safe reopening mechanism. P21 of T4 noted, '*we told the government to let the vaccinated business travellers come; we will monitor them better than anyone else can*'. These entities sought to retain the collaborative policymaking that had emerged during the crisis.

International travel corridors had partially reopened, though volumes remained below pre-pandemic levels. The corporate inbound segment began returning, but demand was uneven and subject to geopolitical and public health developments. P22 of B33 described this as a year of '*testing the waters*'. For many participants (e.g., P22 of B3; P4 of B4; P24 of B7; P29 of B10; P20 of B14), this period marked

the first credible window for revenue recovery since the pandemic's onset. Adaptive Followers began cautiously reactivating dormant facilities, reopening F&B outlets, and re-engaging corporate accounts. Their campaigns were largely reactive, echoing the vaccination messaging pioneered by the innovators. P24 of B7 captured the prevailing sentiment: *'The vaccine was like a lighthouse in the fog. We didn't know if it would guide us home, but it gave us direction'*. However, optimism was tempered by continued uncertainty over virus variants, uneven global vaccination progress, and unpredictable policy shifts, especially surrounding inbound travel rules. A GM recounted, *'Tourism got caught between health policy and economic policy. One day we're told to prepare for visitors, the next we're told to cancel bookings'* (P32 of B12).

Proactive Innovators actively integrated crisis-born niches (domestic leisure, hybrid events) with the returning corporate base, creating blended packages that allowed cross-segment utilisation of space and staff. They relaunched marketing campaigns under themes of *'safe revival'* (P1 of B1) and *'return with confidence'* (P30 of B9). However, Reactive Retrenchers relied heavily on returning corporate clients, showing limited appetite for maintaining domestic or regional niches. Reactive Retrenchers remained hesitant, often citing the unpredictability of the situation. Some continued to operate at minimal capacity, fearing another wave could nullify any gains. P5 of B5 noted, *'We don't want to hire back people and then fire them again. Better to keep things small until the world is more certain'*.

If Phase III carried the cautious optimism of vaccine-led recovery, Phase IV (July 2022 - December 2023) confronted Dhaka's upscale hotel sector with a sobering reality: the pandemic's disruptive effects were not receding on a predictable timeline. New virus variants, intermittent travel restrictions, inflationary pressures, and global supply chain disruptions combined to create a prolonged uncertainty environment. For many participants (P39 of B2; P4 of B4; P23 of B6; P15 of B11; P19 of B13; P18 of B15), the year began with guarded expectations. As a CEO noted: *'We had convinced ourselves that 2022 would be the comeback year. But it was like climbing a hill and finding another hill behind it'* (P15 of B11).

Phase III marked the first substantive rebound attempt. Findings from this phase align with the selection stage of organisational ecology (Hannan & Freeman, 1989) and provide insights into capability deepening. Typological divergence sharpened, with Proactive Innovators moving into multi-niche leadership, Adaptive Followers consolidating cautiously, and Reactive Retrenchers increasingly vulnerable to market volatility. The emergence of long-stay expatriates and partially revived corporate niches demonstrated an incipient ecological recovery, with Proactive Innovators at the forefront. Adaptive Followers began to regain footing, while Reactive Retrenchers risked deeper marginalisation by delaying engagement.

From an organisational ecology standpoint, Phase III represents the early stages of niche re-establishment, facilitated by environmental shifts (vaccination) and adaptive capacity among certain actors. Changes in the macro environment illustrate the principle of adjacent niche exploitation (Hannan & Freeman, 1989), where operators leverage existing assets to capture related but distinct markets. Proactive Innovators demonstrated anticipatory adaptation—not merely responding to demand but shaping it through targeted offers and publicised vaccination campaigns. This aligns with Folke's (2016) and Pernecky and Faisal's (2023) emphasis on foresight and transformation as core to resilience-as-becoming. Political-ecological tensions persisted; inconsistent government signalling created operational uncertainty, echoing the extant literature on policy incoherence in crisis governance (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Faisal et al., 2020a) and institutionalising adaptive routines (Prayag et al., 2023). Political-ecological dynamics remained influential, as market reconfiguration was intertwined with national connectivity policies, labour market regulation, and trade body influence (Bramwell & Lane, 2011). The use of upscale hotels in controlled entry protocols blurred the line between public health infrastructure and commercial hospitality, raising questions about the sector's role in future crisis governance arrangements. This phase also illustrates the path dependency established in Phases I–II. Hotels that had invested early in hybrid events, safety branding, and domestic market cultivation entered Phase III with competitive advantages that Reactive Retrenchers could not easily replicate.

In 2023, Dhaka's upscale hotels operated amid external shocks, including inflation, currency volatility, and geopolitical uncertainty. While some segments, such as domestic corporate travel and selected long-stay expatriate accounts, stabilised, international inbound remained inconsistent. The market entered a phase of adaptive restructuring, where the ability to rebalance cost structures, diversify revenue streams, and retain skilled staff became decisive. One GM described it as *'recovery with turbulence'* (P24 of B7). P24 further

elaborated, *'We had momentum, but every month something new ... exchange rate, flight cancellations, supply chain delays.'*

Proactive Innovators embraced structural changes aimed at long-term viability. This included permanent diversification into ancillary revenue streams, such as food delivery, subscription-based wellness memberships, and co-working space rentals within underutilised banquet areas. An Executive Director explained the rationale: *'If we wait for the old corporate travel volumes to come back, we'll die waiting. Now our hotel is also a gym, an office, a delivery kitchen – and yes, still a hotel.'* (P1 of B1). Innovation extended to strategic partnerships; some hotels invested in wellness suites in partnerships with private tertiary hospitals and offered post-surgery recovery packages. P30 of B9 noted *'It's not huge yet, but it's a stable niche – and it doesn't depend on big conferences'*. Adaptive Followers made incremental adjustments: renegotiating supplier contracts, reconfiguring staffing rosters, and expanding loyalty programme benefits for domestic members. However, Reactive Retrenchers continued to operate at reduced scale, often losing mid-level managers to competitors who offered more stable hours or diversified roles. P25 of B8 explained, *'We've become a training ground for other hotels. We hire and train, then they leave for the places that are busier'*.

Phase IV (Strategic Diversification) was defined by adaptive restructuring under constraint. This phase highlighted that resilience is not a static achievement but a continuous process of niche balancing under evolving conditions. Governance conversations shifted towards long-term tourism policy integration, but participants noted a re-emergence of pre-crisis siloed approaches. Proactive Innovators leveraged the pandemic as a catalyst for permanent diversification, embedding pandemic-era niches into stable revenue portfolios. Adaptive Followers made smaller adjustments, while Reactive Retrenchers continued to shed market relevance. From an organisational ecology perspective, Phase IV illustrates the retention stage in the variation–selection–retention cycle (Hannan & Freeman, 1989). Variations tested in earlier phases, such as hybrid events and elite leisure, were retained and routinised by successful actors.

In resilience-as-becoming (Folke, 2016), the shift from temporary measures to permanent diversification reflects a deeper transformation of organisational identity. Across all five phases, resilience was not achieved through transformation but through pragmatic adjustment and relational governance, often reinforcing, rather than disrupting, existing power asymmetries. These dynamics progressively redefined the functional role of upscale hotels within the urban visitor economy. Upscale urban hotels were no longer simply accommodations for inbound corporate travellers; they became multi-service platforms embedded in a local network of value creation. The political-ecological dynamics underscored policy fragmentation and elite bias (Bramwell & Lane, 2011). Access to certain niches was mediated by government-industry relationships, reinforcing structural inequalities in adaptive capacity. Phase IV thus demonstrates that resilience is not evenly distributed; rather, it is shaped by a complex interplay of capability, connectivity, and political capital.

4.3. Resilience consolidation

In Phase V (Resilience Consolidation), upscale hotels in Dhaka transitioned into what participants repeatedly referred to as the *'new normal'*. Phase V reflects the consolidation of a new tourism equilibrium. While the pre-pandemic corporate inbound niche had partially returned, business travellers no longer dominated the market to the same extent. Instead, a diversified portfolio of demand segments, many born or stabilised during the crisis years, now formed the core of competitive positioning. This period was characterised by strategic reflection on lessons learned and the formalisation of operational and strategic resilience practices to embed adaptive capacity into the sector's future. These organisational transformations had discernible ripple effects across Dhaka's urban tourism landscape. The emergence of domestic MICE, long-stay expatriate segments, and hybrid event markets diversified the city's visitor economy beyond its traditional reliance on inbound corporate travel. Hotels became multifunctional civic spaces, helping reinvigorate urban spaces and redefine Dhaka's post-pandemic urban identity. As P1 from B1 reflected, *'Before COVID, we were almost blind to the domestic market and regional travellers. Now, they are part of our DNA. We don't just wait for the big foreign delegations anymore'*.

By this phase, the pandemic-era niches had evolved into permanence. Domestic MICE was now institutionalised, with government agencies and corporates continuing to favour hotel venues for controlled and tech-enabled events. Long-stay expatriates remained a stable segment, supported by

Bangladesh's ongoing infrastructure projects and foreign investment flows. Proactive Innovators entered this phase in a position of relative strength, having consolidated diverse niches such as hybrid events, elite domestic leisure, long-stay expatriates, medical tourism, and regional MICE. Regional leisure travel emerged as a consistent contributor to weekend occupancy rates for the upscale hotels in Dhaka. P38 of B9 observed *'Before, we didn't really consider those who come to Dhaka for leisure. Now it's a thing – shopping, food, culture'*. Adaptive Followers also benefited from the broader market recovery but tended to consolidate fewer niches, focusing on what worked best for them during 2021–2023. Reactive Retrenchers, by contrast, had either been acquired or repositioned into different segments. Those that remained faced brand erosion, as years of limited adaptation had diminished their reputational capital.

Phase V reflected resilience consolidation, embedding adaptive capacities into strategic routines, producing a more diverse, strategically capable sector. The consolidation phase was not without challenges. Inflationary pressures, currency fluctuations, and global economic headwinds placed cost control back on the agenda. Moreover, the sector faced an emerging talent challenge; many skilled staff who left during the pandemic years had not returned, and the younger workforce showed different expectations regarding work–life balance. Most of the operators formalised crisis management and adaptive strategy frameworks as part of their corporate governance. P20 of B14 mentioned, *'We don't just have a crisis plan in a folder anymore. We have a living team that meets monthly to think about what's next—not just pandemics, but climate risks, political changes, anything that could shake us'*.

Governance relationships were recalibrated. The market was more diverse, capabilities were more integrated, and awareness of political–ecological dependencies was sharper. Proactive Innovators had transitioned into resilience leaders, setting sectoral benchmarks for adaptive governance and market diversification. Trade bodies ought to institutionalise their advocacy gains from the crisis years, pushing for permanent tax reforms, visa facilitation, and integrated tourism development plans. However, several participants expressed scepticism about whether crisis-driven collaboration between government and industry could be sustained. A trade body leader cautioned, *'In a crisis, everyone sits at the same table. In normal times, the silos come back. Our challenge now is to keep those bridges open'* (P26 of T1).

Phase V marks the stabilisation of a post-crisis ecological equilibrium (Faisal et al., 2020b), with a broader and more balanced niche structure than in the pre-pandemic era. The selection pressures of 2020–2023 had weakened less adaptive actors, resulting in a more concentrated but strategically capable set of competitors. The move towards formalised resilience teams and permanent adaptive strategy frameworks aligns with the resilience-as-becoming literature (Folke, 2016), signalling a shift from reactive adaptation to institutionalised anticipatory capacity. Politically, this phase underscores the enduring relevance of the political ecology of tourism governance. The market's diversification did not eliminate dependency on government policies; rather, it reconfigured it. Key growth segments such as MICE remain contingent on regulatory facilitation, visa regimes, and bilateral agreements. This reflects Bramwell and Lane's (2011) observation that governance structures can simultaneously enable and constrain adaptive potential, depending on their inclusivity and long-term coherence. The sector's experience also supports Faisal et al. (2020a) emphasis on multi-scalar linkages between macro governance frameworks and micro-level organisational adaptation. The consolidation of pandemic-era niches into stable revenue streams was possible not only because of organisational innovation but also because of fragmented policy environments that intermittently supported them. Phase V thus illustrates that the endpoint of crisis recovery is not a return to a previous state, but the creation of a different, more complex equilibrium in which resilience is actively maintained rather than assumed.

The trajectories traced here problematise the deterministic tendencies of organisational ecology. While ecological theory has long privileged environmental selection over managerial agency (Hannan & Freeman, 1989), findings of this study reveal that proactive agency, manifested in niche reconstruction, anticipatory adaptation, and strategic diversification, plays a decisive role in survival outcomes. Conversely, passive reliance on environmental recovery, as displayed by Reactive Retrenchers, led to decline. This underscores the limitations of ecological determinism and calls for a more relational framing that acknowledges both structural selection pressures and the enabling role of managerial foresight, institutional ties, and collective sensemaking.

4.5. Implications

4.5.1. Implications for urban tourism research

This longitudinal study repositions resilience in urban tourism as a temporally layered, politically mediated and spatially consequential process, advancing a more critical and contextually grounded research agenda.

- (i) It reconceptualises resilience in urban tourism as a systemic and relational urban property rather than a firm-level capability. While resilience is often operationalised as organisational capability or managerial agility (Prayag et al., 2023), the longitudinal evidence from Dhaka demonstrates that hotel adaptation reshaped the structure and spatial organisation of the urban visitor economy. In doing so, hotels functioned not simply as market actors but as infrastructural nodes within what Logan and Molotch (1976) describe as the urban ‘growth machine,’ where coalitions of business and state actors shape urban development trajectories. Upscale hotels did not simply ‘recover’; they redirected demand towards domestic MICE, hybrid events, wellness-linked accommodation and long-stay expatriate segments. These shifts altered occupancy rhythms, weekend spatial clustering and the functional use of hotel precincts. In this sense, hotels functioned as infrastructural anchors within the urban tourism system (Ashworth & Page, 2011), mediating the city’s adaptive capacity. This finding extends Hall et al.’s (2018) multi-scalar resilience framework by demonstrating how micro-level capability reconfiguration generates meso-level market restructuring and macro-level urban tourism recalibration. For tourism cities research, resilience should therefore be conceptualised relationally as an outcome of interactions between firms, governance regimes and spatial-economic structures, rather than as a bounded organisational trait.
- (ii) The findings foreground resilience as politically mediated selection rather than neutral ecological filtering. Classical organisational ecology privileges environmental determinism (Hannan & Freeman, 1989). However, this study illustrates that ‘selection pressures’ were refracted through governance arrangements, stimulus allocation and regulatory mediation. This aligns with Brenner and Theodore’s (2002) concept of ‘actually existing neoliberalism,’ where crisis management often reinforces market logics while redistributing risk unevenly. As Bramwell and Lane (2011) argue, governance arrangements in tourism are rarely neutral; they privilege certain actors and interests. The ecological metaphor of ‘selection’ in urban tourism must therefore be reframed as politically mediated selection rather than purely environmental filtering. This suggests that urban tourism scholarship must interrogate resilience through the lens of distributive justice and political economy. As Fainstein (2010) argues in her formulation of the ‘just city’, urban policy should be evaluated not solely by efficiency or competitiveness but by equity outcomes. Applying this to tourism cities reframes resilience as a contested terrain where governance decisions shape who benefits from recovery and who absorbs its costs.

In Dhaka, resilience consolidated around actors capable of mobilising institutional capital, while others experienced retrenchment or acquisition. This suggests that resilience in urban tourism may reinforce structural concentration rather than promote systemic inclusivity. Urban tourism research should therefore interrogate resilience not only in terms of recovery speed or market diversification, but also in terms of distributive consequences and power asymmetries. Whose resilience is secured? Which actors are rendered expendable? How do governance arrangements institutionalise advantage? These questions shift resilience debates from technocratic optimisation towards critical urban political economy.

- (iii) The study contributes to debates on post-political urban governance. During acute crisis phases, collaboration intensified, creating an appearance of unified, technocratic coordination. Yet participants described the subsequent re-fragmentation of governance once immediate pressures receded. Swyngedouw (2009) characterises such dynamics as ‘post-political’ governance, where consensus-driven crisis management can obscure deeper structural conflicts and power asymmetries. In Dhaka, resilience consolidation did not fundamentally reconfigure institutional hierarchies; rather, it stabilised a rebalanced but concentrated market structure. This finding challenges celebratory

transformation narratives (Brouder, 2020) by demonstrating how crisis can re-legitimise existing growth coalitions under the banner of resilience.

- (iv) The study demonstrates the theoretical value of longitudinal qualitative research in advancing urban tourism scholarship. Cross-sectional crisis studies risk capturing either early-stage improvisation or retrospective rationalisation. By tracing five phases over five years, this research reveals how niche experimentation becomes institutionalised through retention processes (Hannan & Freeman, 1989), how governance collaboration can regress into fragmentation, and how path dependencies shape long-term competitive positioning. In doing so, the study responds to Crossley's (2020) and Faisal's (2024) calls for temporally sensitive tourism research and extends organisational ecology into urban tourism analysis by empirically illustrating variation-selection-retention dynamics in a megacity context. Longitudinal inquiry exposes resilience as a negotiated and unstable equilibrium rather than a stable end-state. For urban tourism scholarship, this suggests that crisis recovery should be theorised as iterative system reconfiguration rather than linear restoration.

4.5.2. Implications for practice in the management of tourism cities

Managing tourism cities in an era of sustained uncertainty requires moving beyond survival-based stimulus towards institutionalised anticipatory governance, infrastructural integration and equitable resource distribution. Resilience becomes not an emergency response, but a strategic orientation embedded in the political ecology of the city. Insights from this longitudinal study provide substantive implications for policymakers and destination managers responsible for governing tourism cities under sustained turbulence.

First, findings demonstrate that resilience in tourism cities depends on institutional coherence rather than episodic coordination. During the acute crisis phases, collaboration between government agencies, trade bodies and hotel operators intensified. However, participants reported that such collaboration risked dissipating as immediate pressures eased, the study shows that institutional discontinuity produces uncertainty, discouraging long-term investment in innovation. Tourism city managers should therefore institutionalise crisis-era coordination into permanent governance routines: standing inter-agency taskforces, formalised communication channels, integrated event approval systems and scenario-based planning frameworks. As Hall et al. (2018) emphasise, anticipatory governance enhances adaptive capacity by reducing policy volatility and signalling strategic direction. Institutionalising collaboration transforms crisis improvisation into a durable adaptive infrastructure.

Second, hotels should be recognised as strategic urban assets within tourism city planning. This study shows that upscale hotels functioned as flexible platforms for hybrid events, quarantine accommodation, wellness services and controlled-entry gatherings. Their spatial distribution within commercial districts and diplomatic zones positioned them as stabilisers of urban economic activity. This reinforces Ashworth and Page's (2011) argument that urban tourism infrastructure plays a structuring role in city competitiveness. Destination management organisations and municipal planners should therefore integrate hotel infrastructure into broader urban resilience and economic development strategies. Policy frameworks should position hotels as active partners in city-level recovery, event strategy, and risk-preparedness planning, rather than as passive beneficiaries of tourism demand.

Third, equity and inclusion must be central to tourism city resilience policy. The findings reveal that access to stimulus packages, government contracts and regulatory facilitation was uneven. Where resilience mechanisms are channelled through elite networks, recovery risks become exclusionary. As Bramwell and Lane (2011) caution, governance systems can simultaneously enable and constrain adaptation depending on their inclusivity. For tourism cities, transparent allocation criteria, simplified access procedures and monitoring of distributive outcomes are essential to prevent resilience from reinforcing market concentration. Broader participation enhances systemic diversity, which, from an ecological perspective, strengthens adaptive capacity.

Finally, managers within tourism cities must institutionalise diversification and anticipatory governance beyond crisis periods. Proactive Innovators in Dhaka embedded hybridisation, portfolio diversification and risk-scenario planning into routine strategy. This aligns with Prayag et al.'s (2023) emphasis on dynamic capabilities and Folke's (2016) notion of resilience-as-becoming. Resilience should not be reduced to reactive cost containment. Instead, tourism city managers should cultivate diversified demand portfolios,

flexible spatial configurations and cross-sector partnerships during periods of relative stability. Doing so reduces path dependency on single market segments and mitigates cyclical fragility when future shocks emerge.

5. Conclusion

This paper demonstrates that resilience in urban hospitality is not a singular event, but a temporally layered process grounded in ecological, relational, and political dynamics. The ecological dimension is conceptualised as the conditions and expressions of resource use shaped by environmental constraints. The relational dimension refers to the networked interactions among stakeholders that enable coordination and learning, while the political dimension encompasses power relations and governance structures that influence decision-making. These dimensions are mutually constitutive and interact dynamically to determine resilience outcomes. By understanding resilience as a temporally curved process, in which practices of sense-making, coping, adaptation strategies, and shifts in structural conditions are enacted at different stages of a crisis, this framework contributes to the literature on ‘resilience-as-becoming’ and organisational ecology by foregrounding time, power, and relationality as central factors shaping uneven transformation trajectories.

Rather than treating COVID-19 as a crisis event, this study demonstrates the value of examining urban hotel resilience as a process of negotiated becoming, shaped by ecological dependencies and political-economic constraints. By foregrounding a Global South megacity, the study reveals how structural vulnerabilities, fragmented governance, and resource asymmetries mediate resilience in ways that dominant frameworks often overlook. By tracing organisational responses across five phases post-COVID-19, it provides critical insights into how systemic niche collapse disrupted established market dependencies, compelling firms to experiment with new forms of adaptation, diversification, and collaboration. The trajectories of Proactive Innovators, Adaptive Followers, and Reactive Retrenchers reveal that resilience outcomes are shaped not only by managerial choices but also by broader ecological selection pressures and political–ecological contingencies. In this respect, the study advances an ecological-political perspective on urban hospitality resilience, positioning crises as moments of discontinuity that reconfigure the conditions of organisational survival and transformation.

Findings of this study enrich tourism crisis management scholarship; this synthesis underscores how power asymmetries, governance fragmentation, and institutional path dependencies mediate adaptive capacity in emerging economy contexts. Rather than a return to pre-pandemic normality, Dhaka’s hotel sector has entered a new equilibrium characterised by multi-niche diversification and formalised resilience practices. This shift reinforces the value of viewing resilience as ‘becoming’, an ongoing process of adaptive experimentation, capability reconfiguration, and anticipatory governance. By situating resilience within a broader socio-political and ecological frame, this study reaffirms that the long-term viability of urban hospitality lies not in restoring past certainties but in cultivating the adaptive imagination to navigate an era of sustained turbulence. These contributions urge a recalibration of resilience scholarship, moving beyond equilibrium-oriented, firm-centric, and universalist models towards relational, critical, and contextually grounded perspectives. Future research must interrogate not only how organisations adapt, but also whose interests are advanced, whose capacities are marginalised, and how resilience strategies reconfigure governance landscapes in post-crisis urban economies. In advancing this agenda, this study reaffirms that resilience is less a consensual ideal than a contested terrain, where adaptation is as much about negotiating power and legitimacy as it is about restoring business continuity.

This longitudinal study further reveals that embedding resilience in urban tourism cannot be reduced to firm-level agility; it is often constrained by fragmented governance and uneven institutional support. It demonstrates that in Global South megacities such as Dhaka, organisational resilience is inseparable from the adaptive transformation of the urban visitor economy. Without institutionalised collaboration across government, industry, and market actors, resilience risks remain a rhetorical aspiration rather than an operational reality. Resilience in urban tourism must therefore be understood as an evolving political ecology of adaptation, a process through which urban futures are continually negotiated, contested, and reimagined. Policy responses that focus narrowly on survival aid or short-term stimulus neglect the deeper structural reforms needed

to address vulnerabilities in governance frameworks, regulatory systems, and cross-sector coordination. For managers, the findings caution against treating resilience as a reactive posture. Instead, they underscore the necessity of institutionalising adaptive routines, cultivating diversified market portfolios, and recognising resilience as a deliberate and strategic orientation; failure to do so risks perpetuating cyclical fragility in the sector.

Although empirically grounded in Dhaka, the dynamics of politically mediated selection and path-dependent adaptation extend beyond the specifics of a single urban setting, offering broader analytical relevance to urban tourism systems with governance fragmentation and institutional asymmetry. While the empirical dynamics observed in Dhaka remain contextually grounded, the mechanisms identified in this study, including politically mediated selection, path-dependent adaptation, governance fragmentation, and uneven institutional access, offer analytical insights transferable to other tourism cities navigating prolonged uncertainty and structurally uneven recovery conditions. The findings suggest that resilience trajectories are not solely contingent on firm-level capabilities but are also deeply embedded in uneven governance arrangements, regulatory mediation, and differential access to institutional resources. The patterns observed in Dhaka resonate with wider dynamics in emerging and transitional urban economies, where adaptive capacity is often stratified along lines of political capital, network embeddedness, and structural positioning within the urban tourism system. The concept of politically mediated selection provides a critical lens for interrogating how governance processes actively shape competitive outcomes, privileging certain actors while marginalising others. Similarly, the notion of path-dependent adaptation highlights how early-stage strategic responses during periods of acute disruption condition subsequent trajectories, reinforcing divergence over time. These insights contribute to a more nuanced and contextually sensitive understanding of resilience in urban tourism, suggesting that crisis-induced adaptation may reproduce and, in some cases, intensify existing inequalities within the sector. As such, the study offers a transferable analytical framework for examining resilience in other tourism cities, particularly those navigating complex governance landscapes, uneven institutional capacity, and evolving political-economic conditions.

As with all qualitative longitudinal research, the findings are contextually grounded and bounded by the perspectives of participants in Dhaka's upscale hotel sector. First, while this longitudinal design captures temporal dynamics over five years, the study's context-specific insights into Bangladesh's political-ecological governance environment may not map neatly onto other emerging economies with different institutional architectures. Midscale or informal accommodation providers, for example, may exhibit distinct resilience trajectories shaped by different resource dependencies and varied governance relationships. Future research could further examine how politically mediated selection unfolds across different tourism subsectors and organisational scales, including SMEs, informal accommodation providers, and platform-based hospitality enterprises. Second, the reliance on managerial and institutional perspectives, though analytically rich, may underrepresent the voices of frontline employees, guests, and local communities whose experiences also constitute the ecology of resilience in urban tourism. Comparative longitudinal inquiry across Global North and Global South tourism cities would be particularly valuable for examining how different governance regimes shape resilience trajectories, adaptive inequalities, and crisis-induced market restructuring over time. Future research could therefore examine resilience as a relational and contested phenomenon and interrogate how resilience pathways diverge across governance regimes and socio-political-economic contexts. Further research could also investigate how resilience strategies reshape labour precarity, workforce mobility, and socio-spatial inequalities within tourism cities.

Author contributions

CRedit: **Abrar Faisal:** Conceptualisation, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Formal Analysis, Visualisation, Data Curation, Final Approval of the Version to be Published; **Md Ariful Hoque:** Investigation, Writing – review & editing, Formal Analysis, Visualisation, Validation, Data Curation; **Muhammad Shoeb-Ur-Rahman:** Investigation, Writing – review & editing, Validation, Data Curation.

All authors agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Ethics approval

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Centre for Project Management & Information Systems at the University of Dhaka, where the lead investigator, Associate Professor Muhammad Shoeb-Ur-Rahman, is affiliated (Ethics Approval No. EEL5/2020).

Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any stage. All interviews were conducted with written consent and anonymised to protect participants' identities.

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