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Tourism Policy

Tourism policies are a form of industrial policy that relate to the tourism industry and which also frequently include the hospitality and events sectors within their remit. They are a type of public policy, considered as such because they are usually created by governments and other public sector agencies. Tourism policies are both responses to some of the problems associated with tourism development, and aspirations for the future of tourism in a destination. They may be described by their authors as plans, strategies, guidelines or visions, but will normally be long-term in their scope and ambition.

The ultimate responsibility for tourism policy making differs between countries but they are typically published by government ministries or their agencies, such as National Tourism Offices or Destination Management Organisations. The scope of tourism policies can vary geographically from the national to regional and local levels. For instance, a tourism policy for a city, a resort area, or other destination can be the responsibility of devolved, federated or local governments.

A neoliberal shift has taken place in most developed countries, which has seen the state withdraw from the creation and implementation of industrial policy, and which favours only 'light-touch' regulatory government involvement in free markets. The degree to which nongovernment actors can influence tourism policy is dependent on the ideology of the government involved and the subsequent relationship between government, businesses and civil society (Hall, 2011). Increasingly, Public-Private-Partnerships are becoming a feature of the tourism policy landscape to manage these relationships. These vary from formally constituted tourism boards, led by a private sector representative and operating at arm's

length to government, to more informal collaborative arrangements between the public and private sectors (Chaperon, 2017).

Despite this shift, tourism policy remains an area of industrial policy in which almost all governments retain an active interest. This can be explained by the popular view of governments that tourism is effective for achieving sustainable development goals, and economic growth in particular. Alongside these aspirational aims, the potential negative impacts of tourism in a destination also provide a motivation for governments to become involved in the industry, with tourism policy seen as an intervention to mitigate these impacts.

Tourism policy has a role in identifying opportunities for tourism development in a destination. Government ministries and agencies for tourism normally have the responsibility of carrying out research into tourism and producing statistical and other analyses that are useful in identifying trends and opportunities. Tourism policies will build on these analyses to suggest areas of future development, and can outline specific government incentives or support mechanisms to guide and facilitate the industry to focus on these areas.

The negative impacts of tourism in destinations can include environmental degradation, damage to the quality of life of local residents and the crowding out of other economic opportunities. The movement of tourists around the globe, and within countries, has also been identified as a significant source of carbon emissions. Addressing these issues using market mechanisms is difficult, because of the complex and multi-scalar nature of tourism. The industry consists of multiple sectors and sub sectors, often involving highly globalized supply chains and flows of people, and is made up of multi-national corporations, as well as family and lifestyle businesses. Because of this complexity, governments often use tourism policy to provide a framework for consensus building and partnership, to collectively improve the sustainability of the industry, and of destinations. A tourism policy further allows for a more formal interaction between tourism and other public policy areas, such as transport policy, security policy, and environmental policy. Supra-national and international cooperation in tourism policy is also common, as individual states recognize the need for multi-national responses to the impacts of a globalized industry.

Along with these roles of stimulus or mitigation, tourism policy can be developed reactively, in response to crises. Tourism, as an industry, is highly susceptible to external shocks. These can range from unexpected events such as natural disasters, outbreaks of disease and terrorist attacks, to longer term crises such as the climate crisis or developments in the global economy. These crises can result in destinations losing the capacity to welcome tourists due to damage to infrastructure or attractions, or the lack of financial capacity to develop and promote their tourism products internationally. Crucially, a loss of public confidence in the safety or security of a destination can be disastrous. Given the substitutability of many tourism destinations, significant public policy responses are often required to address this in the wake of a crisis.

Tourism policy is normally the output of a policy-making process. Various conceptions exist of the tourism policy-making process. Frequently it is described as having a circular logic, as shown in Figure 1. Policy-making in this model involves a series of rational decisions, from identifying the need for a policy to finally evaluating it, before the cycle begins again. There are critiques of functionalist policy-making models, in particular regarding their neglect of the role of ideology, the significant influence of culture and values, and the nature of domestic and international events that can interrupt and undermine the process. However, such models remain useful in terms of both providing a framework for the creation of tourism policies and for the analysis of tourism policy-making (Dredge & Jenkins, 2007).

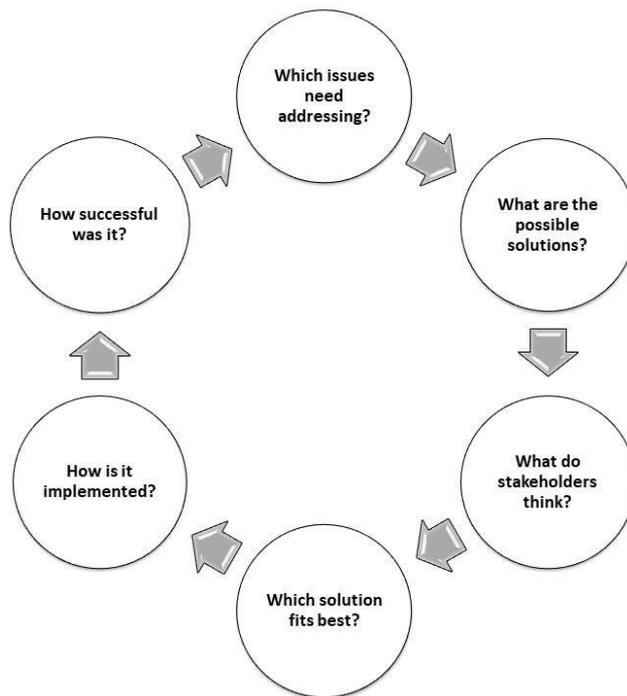


Figure 1 – Tourism policy-making decisions

Various policy instruments are employed by governments in order to achieve their tourism policy aims (Logar, 2010). These instruments are designed to generate responses from businesses, tourists or other stakeholders and can be understood in four main ways – law, money, government action, and advocacy. Legal instruments compel or prohibit particular behaviours. Financial instruments involve public money and can involve funding for tourism projects, or the use of the tax system to encourage or discourage types of tourism activity. Government action describes initiatives where the government or its agencies take a lead role in tourism projects or campaigns. Finally, advocacy instruments involve ‘making the case’ for a policy objective in order to promote the change that the Government wants, without the provision of resources or incentives.

The implementation of tourism policy is rarely without its challenges. There is often a disconnect between what the government thinks should happen in a destination and the needs and aspirations of its tourism stakeholders (Hassan et al., 2020). A lack of consensus around issues, limited industry support for policy objectives, and generally poor buy-in can lead to delays with implementation or eventual failures. This disconnect between the policy intention and the policy outcome is often referred to as the ‘implementation gap’. Even with industry support, successful outcomes are often hampered by uncertain or inconsistent

funding streams, the influence of local politics, or more significant changes as a result of national elections, which encourage short-termism.

Airey (2015) identifies five distinct approaches to tourism policy research. The first of these is research that has concentrated on policy inputs, most frequently critiquing the nature of government involvement in tourism. A second stream of research has more specifically examined the development of governance-style approaches to the creation and implementation of tourism policy. Another focus for tourism policy research has centred on the policy-process and on the roles of tourism policy-makers such as politicians, civil servants, and tourism industry stakeholders. Research into policy outputs and outcomes forms the fourth stream of research, with outputs considered to be the tangible products of the policy-process such as policy documents, plans, statements and press-releases, and outcomes being the measurable impacts of tourism policies in destinations. Finally, the fifth major area of research concerns politics and power, although this has received least attention in the tourism policy literature. Future research into tourism policy will need to consider the substantial reorientation in the role of the state in tourism, following the COVID-19 pandemic, which has seen governments around the world take a more interventionist role in the industry, prompting long term changes in the tourism policy landscape (Kennell, 2020).

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