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Advancing conceptual understanding of partnerships between protected area agencies and the tourism industry: A postdisciplinary and multi-theoretical approach

Abstract

This paper reviews a range of theoretical approaches to partnerships working between protected area agencies and the tourism industry. While partnerships are a hallmark of contemporary thinking about protected area management, research to date leaves considerable scope for development, application and testing of theory. The paper draws eight theoretical approaches from the literature with potential application to a study of the contributors to partnership success. It progresses a postdisciplinary approach to partnership research. A 72 item questionnaire was derived from the theoretical perspectives and completed by 100 partners. Analysis identified features perceived as potentially contributing to a successful partnership as well as the key outcomes of a successful partnership. The findings indicate the prominence of institutional analysis and development, social capital, environmental dispute resolution and network theories in explaining partnership success. Given the centrality of partnerships in protected area tourism and ongoing societal interest in the sustainability of such areas, this paper provides vital insights to further multi-theoretical, postdisciplinary research, and to the successful management of partnerships.

Key Words: institutional analysis and development framework, partnership, protected area, social capital, network, success

Introduction

In applied fields of study such as tourism, much emphasis is now placed on the importance of interdisciplinary and, more recently, postdisciplinary approaches to research (Bramwell and Lane, 2005; Coles, Hall and Duval, 2005). Capitalising on cross-disciplinary synergies can lead to cross-fertilisation and innovation in theory and practice. However, there has been limited illustration of how this is done in the context of a single study, i.e. how does a researcher identify, learn from and apply multiple disciplines and theories to answer a particular research question? This paper reports on an approach to, and some of the findings from, a study that set out to investigate tourism / protected area partnerships from multiple theoretical perspectives and across a number of research disciplines. The study focused on partnerships that facilitate sustainable tourism, with the key

research questions being: (1) what are the features that facilitate successful tourism / protected area partnerships and (2) how do these features contribute to partnership success?

The purposes of this paper are threefold. First, it illustrates how and why eight theoretical perspectives from a variety of disciplines were used in the study to inform an understanding of tourism partnerships associated with protected areas. This postdisciplinary approach, transcending traditional disciplinary boundaries, was used to develop the definition of a successful partnership, to identify the features potentially contributing to successful partnerships, and to develop an approach, methods and research instruments that were able to answer the research questions in an empirical context. Second, it examines the features that most contributed to partnership success and the successful outcomes most widely mentioned by the range of stakeholders studied, using both quantitative and qualitative data. Thirdly, this paper provides an assessment of the relative and collective contribution of the chosen eight theoretical frameworks in identifying the most important features and outcomes of these partnerships.

Partnerships, protected areas and ‘success’

Partnerships between protected area agencies and the tourism industry are increasingly encouraged and promoted in order to achieve sustainable tourism outcomes (Buckley & Sommer, 2001; Eagles *et al.*, 2002; Worboys *et al.*, 2005). Their desirability is partly a function of economic considerations, with partnerships viewed as a vehicle for accessing additional resources, specialised skills and funding (Laing *et al.*, 2008). Furthermore, partnerships present an opportunity for stakeholders with a vested interest in natural areas to have an input into management processes (Leach & Pelkey, 2001). The partnership approach is thus consistent with a new paradigm for protected areas (Locke & Dearden, 2005; Phillips, 2003) which supports more inclusive governance involving the private sector and local communities. References to protected areas in this paper align with the World Conservation Union (IUCN) definition (Phillips, 2003: 8), being areas ‘of land and/or sea especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity and of natural and associated cultural resources and managed through legal or other effective means’. This definition encompasses such diversity as national parks, marine parks, near-urban parks and wilderness areas.

A number of studies and publications in recent years have examined tourism partnership initiatives associated with protected areas (Buckley & Sommer, 2001; De Lacy *et al.*, 2002; DITR, 2003; TTF Australia, 2004; TTF Australia, 2007). At the same time, there has been a considerable body of research beyond tourism that has sought to understand partnerships. In particular, theoretical and practical advances in disciplines such as public administration, natural resource management and

the social sciences can be leveraged for a better insight into the elements or features contributing to successful tourism / protected area partnerships. It is on this broader body of work, rather than the work undertaken within the tourism discipline, that this paper is based.

Research underpinned by two or more disciplinary perspectives can be based on a multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary or postdisciplinary perspective. A number of authors (e.g. Echtner & Jamal, 1997; Leiper, 1981; Przeclawski, 1993) have suggested the need for more interdisciplinary research in tourism as distinct from multidisciplinary research. The latter involves studying a topic by including information from other disciplines, but still operating from within disciplinary boundaries, as has been evident in prior research on tourism / protected area partnerships. In contrast, an interdisciplinary focus involves ‘working *between* the disciplines, *blending* various philosophies and techniques so that the particular disciplines do not stand apart but are brought together intentionally and explicitly to seek a synthesis’ (Leiper, 1981: 72, emphasis in original). This focus assists with a ‘holistic’ understanding of the issue at hand (Przeclawski, 1993: 13). It has been suggested more recently however that a postdisciplinary approach, involving the ‘stripping away of disciplinary boundaries’ (Bramwell and Lane, 2005: 60) and the pursuit of ideas ‘to their logical conclusion rather than to the limits set by their discipline’ (Coles, Hall and Duval, 2005: 34), may provide greater flexibility and scope for creativity for researchers. This is the approach taken here.

Taking a postdisciplinary perspective results in a broadening of what has been considered by some past studies to be a partnership. This paper’s perspective is captured by the following definition: ‘regular, cross-sectoral interactions over an extended period of time between parties, based on at least some agreed rules or norms, intended to address a common issue or to achieve a specific policy goal or goals, which cannot be solved by the partners individually, and involving pooling and sharing of appreciations or resources, mutual influence, accountability, commitment, participation, trust and respect and transparency’ (Laing *et al.*, 2008). This definition incorporates and reconciles elements from a number of definitions of partnership (Bramwell & Lane, 2000; Brinkerhoff, 2002a; Dowling *et al.*, 2004; Leach & Pelkey, 2001; Mohr & Spekman, 1994; Poncelet, 2004; Popay & Williams, 1998; Selin, 1999; Selin & Chavez, 1995; Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000) across a wide body of literature, including public administration, health, tourism, and natural resource, environmental and watershed management.

As with the term ‘partnership’, definitions of ‘success’ are also contested. Moreover, many studies that have examined effective or successful partnerships appear to assume that their meaning is self-evident. Others have adopted sometimes divergent definitions of the phrase ‘partnership success’, focusing either on successful outcomes or successful processes. A more holistic approach

to defining success has been adopted in this study, embracing both process and outcome; an approach used across a variety of disciplines, such as natural resource/environmental management (Poncelet, 2004; Schuett et al., 2001; Toupal & Johnson, 1998; Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000), public administration (Brinkerhoff, 2002a; Dowling et al., 2004; Gray, 1996) and tourism (Blackman et al., 2004). In this paper, success was defined by members of a nation-wide Australian government and industry group acting in an advisory capacity to the project team, as well as the participants themselves (see the methods section of the paper), following the approach taken by Wondolleck and Yaffee (2000: xiii): ‘If an effort was viewed as successful by participants from across the spectrum of involved interests, we took their word for it and worked to understand why they perceived it as a success’.

Postdisciplinary and multi-theoretical perspectives on the elements of successful partnerships

For the purpose of this current study, a postdisciplinary approach was taken to define partnership success and also to identify theories that could enhance understanding of the elements contributing to successful partnerships. Through a review of the literature, eight perspectives were identified: social exchange; adoption/diffusion of innovation; environmental dispute resolution; social representation; network; stakeholder; social capital; and institutional analysis and development theories. Bodies of knowledge were selected that potentially provided insights into how two or more people or parties can work together over time to achieve outcomes that are usually (but not always) beneficial to those involved.

Social exchange theory (SE) explores relationships and interactions between parties (actors), particularly with respect to the exchange of resources and the consequent evaluation of these relationships post-exchange (Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1962, 1972; Thibault & Kelley, 1959). This theory focuses on reciprocity (Beeton, 2006) and exchange occurs where there are desired outcomes (benefits) to be gained from the transaction or process. It encompasses relationships at both the individual and collective levels, including those pertaining to a partnership. Resources can be defined as items of exchange ‘of a material, social or psychological nature’ (Ap, 1992: 668), including ideas or information. Social exchange theory provides a useful framework for examining partnerships, based on the different exchanges that occur between partners and the impacts these exchanges have on partner relationships and partnership success.

Adoption/diffusion of innovations theory (ADI) considers how an innovation, defined as ‘an idea, practice or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption’ (Rogers, 1983:11) is taken up (adopted) and disseminated through a population. The management of protected

areas through partnerships can be regarded as innovative in comparison to more traditional government-centred approaches to protected area management, and the process by which this is introduced and implemented might usefully be explored using this theory. The theory notes that a series of questions must be addressed before adoption will occur: (1) does the innovation offer relative advantage? (2) is the innovation compatible with current practice? (3) can it be trialled without unacceptable risk? (4) are its benefits observable and communicable? (5) is it complex to understand or apply? (Fazio & Gilbert, 2000; Hubbard *et al.*, 2003; Rogers, 1995; Rogers & Shoemaker, 1971; Schiffman *et al.*, 1997).

Environmental dispute resolution theory (EDR) draws on literature dealing with conflict resolution and alternative dispute resolution (Bingham, 1986; Cormick, 1976). It examines what is meant by successful resolution of issues in dispute, and how various processes and the dispute context (including the social or administrative setting) affect the dispute and associated outcomes. An analysis of partnerships similarly requires an understanding of success and the elements that influence it. EDR theory thus potentially helps to evaluate both development of a partnership and its subsequent health. Environmental disputes, like many partnerships, may involve many stakeholders with a multiplicity of views, interests, values or positions (Smith, 2006). The EDR literature has considered both successful and unsuccessful examples of dispute resolution and conflict management.

Social representation theory (SR) aims to explore different attitudes, views and behaviour amongst partners and explain the rationale behind shared attitudes that may result in differences in behaviour. Social representation theory can help to explain conflict in partnerships where members appear to share common views and attitudes. Moscovici (1984: 952) described social representations as ‘a special category of knowledge and beliefs ... those that arise in ordinary communication’. As Fredline and Faulkner (2000: 767) observed, social representations ‘tend to turn the unfamiliar into the familiar, as objects and events are recognized on the basis of past experience, and prior knowledge serves as the reference point of new encounters’. Understanding social representations can assist with identifying underlying sets of knowledge or beliefs that may either facilitate or impede successful partnerships.

Network theory (NT) provides a useful way to illuminate understanding of partnerships, given the link between network relationships and partnerships (Dredge, 2006a, 2006b; Imperial, 2005). There is also a link with diffusion of innovations theory according to Braun (2004: 231), in that successful diffusion may require ‘network cohesion and actors’ trust in and engagement with the network’. Networks and partnerships have been linked by Hall (1999: 276), who defined a network

as ‘the development of linkages between actors’, which may include both individuals and organisations. Hall also conceptualised a partnership as an element along the continuum of relationships which form the network paradigm.

Stakeholder theory (ST) posits that the effect of strategic issues on stakeholders is important, ‘and therefore, processes are needed which help take into account the concerns of many groups’ (Freeman, 1984: 26). The theory has been developed to improve how organisations identify, consider and manage a variety of interests or ‘stakes’ (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997). If partners are regarded as stakeholders, stakeholder theory can help shed light on the interests represented in a protected area / tourism partnership, as well as reconciling these interests in order to pursue common outcomes (Sautter & Leisen, 1999).

Social capital theory (SC) focuses on how people or organisations interact or function within social structures, systems or networks (Coleman, 1988). These structures include ‘networks, roles, rules and precedents’, as well as ‘norms, values, attitudes and beliefs’ (Beeton, 2006: 91). Three types of social capital have been identified through the literature: bonding, bridging and linking. Bonding social capital develops through ties with family or friends or a common social/cultural group, e.g. ethnicity (Macbeth *et al.*, 2004; Productivity Commission, 2003). Bridging social capital develops through ‘network ties’ (Macbeth *et al.*, 2004), while linking social capital is built as a result of hierarchical relationships ‘where power, social status and wealth are accessed by different groups’ (Productivity Commission, 2003: 18). Bridging and linking social capital are potentially relevant to a study of partnerships, given that partners are likely to come from a variety of backgrounds and interests and there may be power differentials at play with a mix of government and non-government partners. Social capital, with its focus on networks and relationships (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000; Putnam, 1993), improves understanding of why and how people might work together in partnerships and helps to explain the success or failure of collaborative efforts.

The *institutional analysis and development framework* (IAD) is the final theory considered in this review. The framework focuses on the use of rules and ‘rule-ordered relationships’ (Imperial, 1999: 454), both formal and informal, to address the problems faced by stakeholders. It requires a clear understanding of the issue at hand, the nature or interests of the various group members and the institutional setting or context (Imperial, 1999; Ostrom, 1990). The basis of the IAD framework is the institution, which Imperial (1999: 453, citing Ostrom *et al.*, 1993) refers to broadly as including bodies or groups ‘defined by rule, norms and shared strategies’. This would cover a partnership in its various guises. The IAD framework assists in understanding the roles played by legal and administrative arrangements, including transaction costs (Imperial, 1999), as well as the links

between equity, efficiency, accountability and adaptability (Imperial, 1999; Ostrom, 1999) and partnership performance.

Methods

The wider study from which this paper is derived explores a number of different types of Australian protected area tourism partnerships and the perceptions and attitudes of the partners regarding their efficacy. The methodological approach taken in this study involved (1) a review of the literature from a number of disciplines and development of a questionnaire, (2) identification of a series of case studies of partnerships, (3) selection of participants, who were then contacted to take part in the study and (4) requesting participants to self-complete a questionnaire, which was then followed up with structured interviews to discuss their responses. The details of this approach are outlined below.

Postdisciplinary instrument development

Based on these eight theoretical perspectives, a self-completed questionnaire with 72 items was developed that could gauge the contribution of numerous *features* to successful partnerships, as well as itemise the *outcomes* of partnerships. For example, the emphasis on rules and structure in the IAD framework contributed to a number of questionnaire items such as ‘Legal arrangements exist to implement the results produced by the partnership’ and ‘Shared accountability for decision-making’. The relationships that are integral to SC theory also influenced items throughout the questionnaire, particularly general partnership outcomes such as ‘Improved understanding of other partners’ interests’ or ‘Reduced conflicts between partners’. The items used in the questionnaire were often based on multiple theoretical sources; indeed, the boundaries between the different disciplines and theories are fluid, the ramifications of which are discussed in greater detail later in this section.

A total of 44 items were developed to capture partnership *features*, organised into three categories: 12 partner-related (features of the partners / partnership), 20 process-related (features of working together), and 12 context-related (features of the working environment) (Bingham, 1986), an approach that acknowledges the fundamental contribution of EDR to partnership research while incorporating partnership features identified in other bodies of literature (Laing *et al.*, 2008).

As illustrated in Table 1, in reviewing the contribution of the eight theories to identifying the 44 features, 9 items were informed by only 1 theory, while the remaining 35 items were informed by two or more theories. Theories that identified features not covered by any other perspective included IAD (6 items), EDR (2 items) and NT (1 item). EDR and SC tended to be similar theoretically in that they often contributed to the same items, 16 of them in total. There was an overlap between SC and

IAD and between IAD and EDR for 13 items respectively. Theories that informed over half of the items included IAD (31 items), EDR (23 items) and SC (22 items). Collectively, IAD, SC and EDR underpinned 42 of the 44 items in the questionnaire. The remaining items drew on ADI and NT ('Issues considered in new ways') and NT ('Adequate financial support for the partnership'). Together, IAD and EDR underpinned 41 items, while IAD and SC underpinned 40 items and SC and EDR 29 items.

Table 1. Contribution of Theories to Identifying Partnership Features

<u>Partner-related features</u>	<u>Process-related features</u>	<u>Context-related features</u>
Decision makers directly involved in the partnership EDR	Open communication between partners ADI, EDR, SR, SC, IAD	Adequate organisational support for the partnership IAD
Support provided by protected area agency ADI, IAD	Trust between partners EDR, NT, SC, IAD	Current legislation (where legislation includes regulations) supports tourism in protected areas IAD
Participation by all partners encouraged EDR, NT, SC	Commitment by partners to the partnership SC, IAD	Recognition of the legal obligations of the partners IAD
Leadership provided by at least one of the partners ADI, IAD	Agreement by partners on the purpose of the partnership ADI, EDR, SR, ST, SC, IAD	Adequate financial support for the partnership NT
Leadership was effective ADI, IAD	Problems addressed by the partnership as they occur EDR, SC, IAD	Recognition of the goals of the partners EDR, IAD
Empathy between the partners encouraged EDR, ST, SC	Conflict managed as it arises EDR, SC, IAD	Current administrative arrangements (excluding legislation) support tourism in protected areas IAD
Inclusion of all people affected by the partnership EDR, NT, SC	Fair decision-making SE, IAD	Written agreement developed by the partners EDR, IAD
Willingness by partners to adapt to changing situations ADI, IAD	Agreement by partners on the problem(s) being addressed by the partnership EDR	Issues of potential risk associated with the partnership are or have been addressed IAD
Issues considered in new ways ADI, NT	Equal opportunity for every one to contribute at partnership meetings EDR, NT, SC	Legal arrangements exist to implement the results produced by the partnership IAD
Efforts towards power sharing made within the partnership SE, EDR, NT, ST, SC	Transparent decision-making EDR, IAD	Sufficient time has passed for the partnership to be effective ADI, SC, IAD

Power equally distributed between the partners EDR, NT, ST, SC	Good quality information available IAD, EDR, SC, ADI	Shares accountability for actions EDR, IAD
Leadership provided by a non-government person ADI, IAD	Sufficient information available IAD, EDR, SC, ADI	Shares accountability for decision-making EDR, IAD
	Flexible decision-making EDR, SC, IAD	
	Partners aim for consensus when making decisions EDR, SC	
	Partners feel a sense of obligation to each other SE, ADI, SC	
	Regular meetings between partners ADI, IAD	
	Cost-effective process ADI, SC, IAD	
	Time-efficient process ADI, SC, IAD	
	Partners dependent on each other to get what they want SE, EDR, NT, SC	
	Access to influential people and/or organisations ADI, SC, IAD	

Key: (A) SE = Social Exchange Theory; ADI = Adoption/Diffusion of Innovations; EDR = Environmental Dispute Resolution; SR = Social Representation; NT = Network Theory; ST = Stakeholder Theory; SC = Social Capital Theory; IAD = Institutional Analysis and Development

Partnership *outcomes* on the other hand were categorised as either general outcomes of the partnership or outcomes for sustainable tourism. A total of 28 outcomes, 14 in each of the two categories of general partnership outcomes and sustainable tourism outcomes, were identified from the literature (see Table 2); each forming an item in the questionnaire. In reviewing the contribution of theories to identifying these outcomes, unlike partnership features, *all* items were informed by two or more theories, with 24 items informed by three or more theories. All of the 14 general partnership outcomes were informed by SC theory. As with partnership features, IAD and EDR tended to be similar theoretically with respect to outcomes, in that they contributed to 21 of the same items. There was an overlap of 17 items for EDR and SC and the SC and IAD pair. Theories that informed over three-quarters of the items were IAD (23 items), EDR (23 items) and SC (22 items). Collectively, IAD, SC and EDR underpinned all of the 28 items in the questionnaire. Combinations of IAD and SC theory and SC and EDR theory also underpinned all 28 items, while IAD and EDR theory underpinned 25 items. Further examination of the implications of these theoretical contributions to protected area tourism research is provided in the discussion section of the paper.

Table 2. Contribution of Theories to Identifying Partnership Outcomes

<u>Partnership successes/outcomes</u>	<u>Sustainability outcomes</u>
Purpose of partnership achieved or being achieved EDR, NT, SC	Improved understanding of the values of protected areas by partners SE, ADI, EDR, NT, SC, IAD
Benefits from the partnership to all partners SE, EDR, NT, SC, IAD	Improved biodiversity conservation in the protected area SE, EDR, NT, IAD
Improved information available for protected area management EDR, SC, IAD	Greater respect for culture, heritage and/or traditions SR, SC
Improved relationships with other partners EDR, SC, IAD	Improved quality of environmental conditions SE, IAD, NT, EDR
Improved understanding of other partners' interests EDR, SC, IAD	Protection of culture, heritage and/or traditions SC, SR
Reduced conflicts between partners EDR, SC, IAD	Increased social benefits for local communities SE, EDR, SC
Stimulation of innovative approaches ADI, EDR, NT, SC, IAD	Increased engagement of the local community in tourism SR, NT, ST, SC, IAD
Improved access to funding for the site/protected area EDR, SC, IAD	Increased prosperity for the local community EDR, SC, IAD
Improved access to decision-making NT, SC	Reduced production of waste by visitors SE, EDR, NT, IAD
Improved access to funding for the organisation, business or community EDR, SC, IAD	Improved economic viability of the protected area EDR, SC, IAD
Economic gain for protected area management EDR, SC, IAD	Reduced use of energy associated with protected area tourism SE, EDR, NT, IAD
Economic gain by one or more members of the tourism industry EDR, SC, IAD	Reduced production of waste by tourism enterprises SE, EDR, NT, IAD
Strengthening of organizational/business capacity EDR, SC, IAD	Reduced use of water associated with protected area tourism

	SE, EDR, NT, IAD
New relationships with influential people and/organisations SC, IAD	Improved competitiveness of the protected area as a tourist destination EDR, SC, IAD

Key: (A) SE = Social Exchange Theory; ADI = Adoption/Diffusion of Innovations; EDR = Environmental Dispute Resolution; SR = Social Representation; NT = Network Theory; ST = Stakeholder Theory; SC = Social Capital Theory; IAD = Institutional Analysis and Development

Given the number of both features and outcomes derived from the literature, the relative importance of each of these was of interest, and thus the views of individuals involved in a range of partnerships was sought.

Case study selection

The target population in this study were representatives of partners of tourism / protected area partnerships associated with a miscellany of protected areas across Australia. Given Australia’s extensive protected area network largely managed by state-based protected area management agencies, and with 10.5% of its land area and 8.0% of its territorial waters held in terrestrial and marine protected areas respectively (Standing Committee, 2007), a diversity of partnership arrangements and partners can be examined. Moreover, Australia has firmly embraced economic rationalism with an associated enthusiasm for partnerships in order to share costs and improve the efficiency of government services (Moore, 2005).

A total of 21 partnerships were selected for detailed analysis as ‘cases’, using the definition of partnerships provided earlier in this paper. Selection was based on several criteria: (1) geographical location, given the overall aim of an Australia-wide project, (2) coverage of a broad range of partnerships, including differing levels of formality, distance from metropolitan areas, type of protected area (terrestrial/ marine) and type of tourism operation (accommodation/activity/access), as well as the involvement of different sectors, groups or individuals i.e. community/ private sector/ government/ NGO /indigenous partners, (3) input from the STCRC study’s Industry Reference Group (IRG) and (4) the literature on previous partnership research (e.g. Buckley and Sommer, 2001; De Lacy *et.al.*, 2002). Included in the set of cases studied were partnerships of varying size and complexity (two to 32 members), partners that included the tourism industry (large and small operators), government departments, non-government organisations, community members, local government (i.e. county / shire / provincial) and indigenous members.

Following case study selection, secondary data such as reports, brochures and Websites was collected and analysed in order to build case study profiles of each of the 21 partnerships.

Participant selection

Respondents were initially selected using purposive sampling, in that respondents were chosen with the specific purpose of being a representative of a partner and/or having sufficient experience and exposure to be able to respond with depth and insight (Neuman, 2000: 19). The advice of an industry reference group was sought in this regard, as they played a role in the selection of the case studies and were aware of the background and nuances of the different partnerships. Additionally, snowball (chain referral) sampling was used to gain access to respondents who were not immediately identifiable as partners (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 1992). Occasionally, some representatives were unavailable or unable to be contacted, however in the main, representatives of all the partners in a particular case study took part in this research.

Data collection and analysis

A multi-method approach was used in this study. A questionnaire was mailed or emailed to respondents who agreed to take part in the study and then collected by the researchers (or posted back) once completed. Upon receiving the completed questionnaire, a convenient interview time was arranged with the participant. The interview questions were the same for each participant and based on the questionnaire responses. These questions were aimed at obtaining more in-depth qualitative information about a specific partnership. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed.

For each feature and each outcome in the questionnaire, respondents were asked to rate its importance using a 5-point scale, from 1 representing 'not at all important' to 5 representing 'extremely important'. This paper uses the mean importance scores on each item to ascertain the features perceived by partners as most contributing to partnership success. Furthermore, quantitative analysis was aimed at identifying which theories and combinations proved to be most useful in informing key success features and outcomes, as a basis for recommending approaches for future research.

Results

A total of 100 completed questionnaires were returned, and 97 follow-up interviews were conducted. Only those results of direct relevance to the purposes of this paper are described here, with qualitative (interview) data used to illustrate the quantitative (questionnaire) findings. Examination of the

importance ratings on the 44 items included in the questionnaire as *features* of partnerships (see Table 3) reveals that, overall, the item that received the highest mean importance score was ‘Open communication between partners’ (4.57) (a process-related feature); an item that was sourced from five of the eight theoretical perspectives. As discussed earlier, while many items were sourced from three or more theoretical areas (see Table 1), six of the nine items with the highest mean scores for partner-related, process-related and context-related features were drawn from only one or two theoretical areas. Examples include ‘Decision makers directly involved in the partnership’, derived solely from EDR and ‘Adequate organisational support for the partnership’, drawn from IAD. This suggests that sourcing and developing the questionnaire items from multiple theoretical perspectives was critical to ensuring that the features perceived by interviewees as most important to successful partnerships were identified. The three items with the highest mean importance scores for each of the partner-related, process-related and context-related categories of features are discussed in more depth below, with illustrative quotes drawn from comments made during the follow-up interviews.

Table 3. Features receiving the highest mean importance rating (n=100)

<u>PARTNER-RELATED FEATURES</u>	Theoretical Sources ^(A)	Mean Importance ^(B)
Decision makers directly involved in the partnership	EDR	4.48
Support provided by protected area agency	ADI, IAD	4.45
Participation by all partners encouraged	EDR, NT, SC	4.40
<u>PROCESS-RELATED FEATURES</u>	Theoretical Sources ^(A)	Mean Importance ^(B)
Open communication between partners	ADI, EDR, SR, SC, IAD	4.57
Trust between partners	EDR, NT, SC, IAD	4.44
Commitment by partners to the partnership	SC, IAD	4.41
<u>CONTEXT-RELATED FEATURES</u>	Theoretical Sources ^(A)	Mean Importance ^(B)
Adequate organisational support for the partnership	IAD	4.34
Current legislation (where legislation includes	IAD	4.31

regulations) supports tourism in protected areas		
Recognition of the legal obligations of the partners	IAD	4.28

Key: (A) SE = Social Exchange Theory; ADI = Adoption/Diffusion of Innovations; EDR = Environmental Dispute Resolution; SR = Social Representation; NT = Network Theory; ST = Stakeholder Theory; SC = Social Capital Theory; IAD = Institutional Analysis and Development

(B) 1= Not at all Important -> 5=Extremely Important

Partner-related features

The three partner-related features with the highest mean importance scores were:

- Decision makers directly involved in the partnership – 4.48.
- Support provided by protected area agency – 4.45.
- Participation by all partners encouraged – 4.40.

The **involvement of decision-makers in the partnership process** may assist with acceptance of power differentials between partners (De Araujo and Bramwell, 2002: 1152) and help to restore a level of trust in the types of decisions that the agency might ultimately make (Beierle and Konisky, 2000). Direct involvement of decision makers is also a factor that may increase the likelihood of EDR success (Bingham, 1986), where ‘those with the authority to implement the decision’ are part of the process (Bingham, 1986: xxiv). It is also more efficient. As one of the interviewees noted, ‘It speeds up the process and gives a sense of ‘feeling’ amongst the partners that when they discuss something they actually can move forward’ [protected area agency representative].

Support provided by a protected area agency was also an important partner-related feature, which may assist in the supplying of ‘technical expertise or information’ (Leach and Pelkey, 2001: 383), ensure that all key stakeholders are represented within the partnership (Bramwell and Lane, 2000; Leach and Pelkey, 2001; Schuett *et al.*, 2001) and facilitate the process of collaboration (Schuett *et al.*, 2001). The latter is illustrated by one interviewee in the current study noting that ‘The relationship between [the protected area management agency] and us [accommodation provider] has been collaborative and supportive. This relationship exists between the owner and a number of levels within the agency, including regional and district staff, licensing staff in the Department’s head office and members of the senior executive’ [accommodation provider]. The IAD framework, according to Leach and Pelkey (2001), supports involvement by agency staff in a partnership as a means of supplying expertise and information and thus providing economic benefits through greater efficiency.

The third most important partner-related feature, **participation by all partners encouraged**, reflects the need for a power balance among partners (Bramwell and Sharman, 1999; Bramwell and Lane, 2000), which has been argued to produce better decision-making and greater satisfaction in the outcomes reached, as well as building trust and social capital (Wondolleck and Yaffee, 2000; Leach and Sabatier, 2005). The benefits of such participation can be seen in the following observation by a private sector representative in the study:

There is a 'conspiracy' feeling through the community here. We had to communicate with all stakeholders and do whatever is required to bring [the project] into being. We have had many community meetings, as we feel it is important to take the people along the journey of what this is and what it will do. Most people are now on board.

Process-related features

The three process-related features with the highest mean importance scores were:

- Open communication between partners – 4.57.
- Trust between partners – 4.44.
- Commitment by partners to the partnership – 4.41.

As illustrated in Table 3, **open communication between partners** has been discussed in several areas of the literature as a success factor behind partnerships (Mohr and Spekman, 1994; Leach and Pelkey, 2001; Schuett *et al.*, 2001) including EDR theory, which highlights the importance of effective communication in dispute resolution (Leach and Pelkey, 2001) and SC theory, which addresses exchange of ideas and information and interaction/networks between individuals (Falk and Kilpatrick, 2000; Productivity Commission, 2003; Pretty and Ward, 2001). Providing an 'open and inclusive' process facilitates decision making and the reaching of consensus. As one protected area agency representative observed:

You need to keep communication happening – give people notice of your plans. Clarity of roles is important and a written agreement should help with this, but there is also an onus on us to work out a program of works/projects and involve them with this. It's important to communicate this early on in the piece so they can make their own plans and know who is doing what. This avoids off the cuff decisions and things dreamed up out of left fieldⁱ.

Trust between partners is also recognised as an important feature of partnerships, helping to lessen a partner's fear of 'opportunistic behaviour' (Mohr and Spekman, 1994: 146) and breaking

down barriers (Wondolleck and Yaffee, 2000). It is also an integral dimension of some forms of social capital according to SC theory (Coleman, 1988; Falk and Kilpatrick, 2000; Productivity Commission, 2003; Beeton, 2006). Trust takes time to develop (Cropper, 1996; Imperial, 2005) and is a dynamic concept that can be difficult to assess (Schuett *et al.*, 2001), as noted by one interviewee: ‘Trust built up over years is a key ingredient of any fruitful relationship ... [It] is the most difficult thing in a partnership, with its ups and downs’.

The third most important process-related feature, **commitment by partners to the partnership**, refers to a ‘willingness to exert effort on behalf of the relationship’ (Mohr and Spekman, 1994: 137) and may be measured by partnership involvement, respect and empathy and degree of trust built up (Bramwell and Lane, 2000). Commitment is a form of social capital (Moore *et al.*, 2007) and is linked by the IAD framework with institutional change (Imperial, 1999; Ostrom, 1990). A protected area agency representative in the current study referred to the need for commitment by a variety of stakeholders (‘Commitment needs to be from a high-level (without a high-level sign-off, the partnership won’t go anywhere) but also a strong bottom-up approach’), while a volunteer highlighted the link between commitment and a sense of common obligation or shared responsibility (‘Because of the partners’ commitment everyone feels a sense of obligation, everyone feels responsible’).

Context-related features

The three context-related features with the highest mean importance scores were:

- Adequate organisational support for the partnership – 4.34.
- Current legislation (where legislation includes regulations) supports tourism in protected areas – 4.31.
- Recognition of the legal obligations of the partners – 4.28.

Adequate organisational support for the partnership might include staff, expertise, equipment or pooling of resources (Imperial, 2005; Charters and Smith, 2004; Schuett *et al.*, 2001). The importance of resources and administrative assistance is further informed by and reinforced in the IAD literature (Leach and Pelkey, 2001; Imperial, 2005) and is illustrated by one tour operator’s reference to the need for ‘organisational support (financial and administration) by the protected area agency – with people specifically involved, providing consistent contacts that have a focus on making the partnership a success’.

Another key context-related feature was the existence of **current legislation (where legislation includes regulations) that supports tourism in protected areas**. The literature appears to be divided on the need for legislation, with some studies suggesting that it is important or conducive to a partnership approach (Buckley and Sommer, 2001; Dowling *et al.*, 2004), while others such as Chadwick (2004) advocate a less prescriptive approach based on performance standards. The current study, however, supports the existence of an appropriate legislative framework, illustrated by the following comment by a volunteer: ‘The existing rules and regulations are suitable and applicable for the island, e.g. spear fishing is not allowed and there is a proposed exclusion zone. The legislation allows for tourism but tourism has to comply with the rules’. This is consistent with the IAD framework, that successful partnerships have well defined shared understandings or decisions (Ostrom, 1999; Imperial, 2005).

Recognition of the legal obligations of the partners is linked to the existence of legislation and supports the necessity of legislative frameworks imposing ‘statutory responsibilities’ (Bahaire and Elliott-White, 1999: 255). As one tour operator explains, ‘This is most important if something went wrong. The partnership is early [implying that nothing has gone wrong yet but if it did], the onus is on us, not the partnership’. This suggests the need to prescribe legislative obligations and responsibilities in the early years of a partnership, where relationships are new and perhaps less likely to be underpinned by important features such as trust or commitment. As with the existence of legislation, the importance of this feature is consistent with the perspective of the IAD framework, in that these legal obligations are usually based on a set of ‘rules’, which are then used to address or ‘solve’ problems (Imperial, 1999; Imperial, 2005; Leach and Pelkey, 2001).

Turning now to outcomes of the partnership (see Table 4), for the 28 items included in the questionnaire, the highest importance mean was for ‘Purpose of partnership achieved or being achieved’ (4.50), an item that was sourced from three of the eight theoretical perspectives. The three items with the highest mean importance scores for each of the general partnership outcomes and sustainable tourism outcomes are discussed below, together with illustrative quotes from the interviews.

Table 4. Outcomes receiving the highest mean importance rating (n=100)

<u>PARTNERSHIP SUCCESS/OUTCOMES</u>	Theoretical Sources (A)	Mean Importance ^(B)
Purpose of partnership achieved or being achieved	EDR, NT, SC	4.50

Benefits from the partnership to all partners	SE, EDR, NT, SC, IAD	4.32
Improved information available for protected area management	EDR, SC, IAD	4.07
<u>SUSTAINABILITY OUTCOME</u>	Theoretical Sources (A)	Mean Importance ^(B)
Improved understanding of the values of protected areas by partners	SE, ADI, EDR, NT, SC, IAD	4.46
Improved biodiversity conservation in the protected area	SE, NT, IAD, EDR	4.44
Greater respect for culture, heritage and/or traditions	SR, SC	4.42

Key: (A) SE = Social Exchange Theory; ADI = Adoption/Diffusion of Innovations; EDR = Environmental Dispute Resolution; SR = Social Representation; NT = Network Theory; ST = Stakeholder Theory; SC = Social Capital Theory; IAD = Institutional Analysis and Development

(B) 1= Not at all Important -> 5=Extremely Important

Most important general outcomes from the partnership

The three general partnership outcomes with the highest mean importance scores were:

- Purpose of partnership achieved or being achieved – 4.50.
- Benefits from the partnership to all partners – 4.32.
- Improved information available for protected area management – 4.07.

The most important outcome, **purpose of partnership achieved or being achieved**, was also noted as a successful partnership outcome (‘advancing a shared vision’) by Gray (1996), and SC theory recognises the importance of ‘the community-of-common-purpose’ (Lave and Wenger, 1991). One protected area agency representative refers to the importance of this outcome in the following terms:

In reality the total outcome is greater than the sum of parts. We wouldn’t achieve things to the extent that we would without this partnership. We share information and work towards common goal. If not for the precedent set ... and pressure created by stakeholders, [the protected area agency] may have not agreed to remove cattle grazing from the [park]. The overarching concept [purpose] is to get consistent management ... Without the partnership, we wouldn’t achieve this.

Another key outcome, achieving **benefits from the partnership to all partners**, could be characterised as a social gain. De Lacy *et al.* (2002) refer to the social equity argument supporting

benefits flowing from tourism to all stakeholders, while others refer to the importance of a win-win situation for all partners (Jamal and Getz, 1995; Buckley and Sommer, 2001). A number of theories used in the current study deal with the importance of shared benefits, particularly SE theory, where exchange behaviour occurs when there are benefits to be gained from the process (Beeton, 2006), as well as IAD theory, which highlights the benefits flowing from the pooling of resources by partners (Imperial, 2005). A quote by a representative of a protected area agency illustrates this partnership outcome as follows:

You've got to have a win-win [situation], otherwise someone is carrying the can. Some of the wins for the environment aren't as noticeable as others. If our infrastructure is maintained well [by a tourism operator], it attracts a different clientele – someone who is not likely to damage the parks.

The third most important outcome, **improved information available for protected area management**, is another successful partnership outcome identified by Gray (1996) and might lead to efficiency or productivity gains through shared knowledge (De Lacy *et al.*, 2002; Buckley and Sommer, 2001). Leach and Pelkey (2001) identify the provision of adequate information as consistent with the IAD framework – providing enough information so that agreements can be reached which 'benefit all sides'. The following quote from a protected area agency involved in a cooperative management partnership links information sharing outcomes with economic benefits: 'Sharing information has benefits through not reinventing the wheel all the time. If one does an innovative thing, the rest can see how they solve the problem. It has a level of efficiency'.

Outcomes for sustainable tourism

The three sustainable tourism outcomes with the highest mean importance scores were:

- Improved understanding of the values of protected areas by partners – 4.46.
- Improved biodiversity conservation in the protected area – 4.44.
- Greater respect for culture, heritage and/or traditions – 4.42.

The most important sustainable tourism outcome, **improved understanding of the values of protected areas by partners**, reflects the importance of empathy within the partnership with the goals and aims of protected areas, as the stepping stone towards 'achieving a common language' (Steffen, 2004: 63), or the exchange of information about visions and understanding (Gray, 1996). Others such as Charters and Smith (2004: 163) refer to the need for 'respect for social and cultural values', which is consistent with SC theory, in that the latter considers the ways that individuals have

acquired ‘new world views’ through the building of social capital (Pretty and Ward, 2001). EDR theory also assists with understanding this partnership outcome in that, while acknowledging that ‘value differences’ are a constant between different groups (Wondolleck, 1988: 213), conflict resolution relating to those differences will occur when the parties agree to deal with issues on which they disagree, despite ‘continuing differences over basic values’. In the current study, one interviewee, a representative of local government, discussed at length the importance of partners having a greater understanding of the values associated with protected areas:

While increased economic prosperity and increased engagement of the local community in tourism are important, in order for tourism to be sustainable, there must be an understanding of the value of protected areas ... There is a sense that [parks agencies] want to lock people out of parks – ‘conspiracy theory’ – and mistrust. This needs to be changed. There has to be a level of understanding of what must be valued and protected. A Community Reference Group is a good model for this – it has worked to change values and perceptions and helps people to see a value in protected areas – what is so special about these places? ... The agency brought in experts to address the group and they were very inspiring. They spoke about what needs to be protected and why ...

Another important outcome for sustainable tourism is **improved biodiversity conservation in the protected area**. Buckley and Sommer (2001) refer to the importance of conservation outcomes such as protection of wildlife, while Mburu and Birner (2007) note the use of partnerships connected with protected areas to achieve conservation goals. The IAD framework is particularly helpful here, with its references to compatibility of rules with the environment (physical/biological) (Ostrom *et al.*, 1994; Imperial, 1999). A representative of a visitor centre referred to the achievement of biodiversity outcomes by their partnership: ‘The partnership has raised awareness– actual facts and figures ... they didn’t have that info[rmation] before our program started, ... the frequency and abundance and the nesting population. We’ve used [this information/awareness] to slow down and hopefully stop a new tourism development ...’

The third most important sustainable tourism outcome is **greater respect for culture, heritage and/or traditions**. This is again a social goal or outcome, where the partnership can help to bridge social divides (Robinson, 1999; Fuller, Buultjens and Cummings, 2005; Mburu and Birner, 2007) or ‘encourages greater respect for local communities and traditional and indigenous peoples’ (Phillips, 2003: 21), a hallmark of the paradigm shift in protected area management towards shared governance and use of local knowledge, identified earlier in this paper. SC theory also covers the

building of shared norms, values and attitudes of a community (Falk and Kilpatrick, 2000). This importance of changing attitudes and awareness is exemplified by the words of a tour operator representative in the current study: ‘Because we have learned, we are now able to pass [this] on to our passengers, we are in the position to educate our passengers [about different cultures, heritages and/or traditions]’.

Now that the most important features and outcomes of partnerships associated with protected areas have been identified, the next section focuses on determining which theories were prominent in explaining partnership success, as well as the broader concern of progressing postdisciplinary research approaches for tourism / protected area partnerships.

Discussion

The postdisciplinary nature of this research endeavour is demonstrated by Table 5, which shows the most prominent theories linked to the most important (top 3) features and outcomes of partnerships as perceived by partners. In terms of features contributing to partnership success, constructing the 44-item set used in the questionnaire (Table 1) required a minimum of four theories: IAD, SC, EDR and NT, although a set of 42 items was possible using only IAD, SC and EDR theories. In the case of outcomes, IAD, SC and EDR theories underpinned all of the 28 items in the questionnaire (Table 2). Thus, IAD, SC, and EDR appear central to partnership research, not as individual theories but as a collection that together help to describe the elements contributing to successful partnerships.

Table 5. ‘Prominent’ theories from most important features contributing to partnership success and to most widely mentioned outcomes

CATEGORY OF ITEMS	TOP THREE ITEMS*	THEORIES							
		IAD	SC	EDR	NT	ADI	SE	SR	ST
Features of partners	Decision makers involved... Support provided... Participation by all...	●	●	●●	●	●			
Features of working together	Open communication... Trust... Commitment by partners ...	●●●	●●●	●●	●	●		●	
Features of working environment	Adequate organisational support... Current legislation... Recognition of legal obligations ...	●●●							
Partnership successes/outcomes*	Purpose achieved... Benefits... Improved information ...	●●	●●●	●●●	●●		●		
Sustainability outcomes*	Improved understanding of values .. Improved biodiversity... Greater respect for culture ...	●●	●●	●●	●●	●	●●	●	

TOTALS		11	9	9	6	3	3	2	0
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Key: (A) SE = Social Exchange Theory; ADI = Adoption/Diffusion of Innovations; EDR = Environmental Dispute Resolution; SR = Social Representation; NT = Network Theory; ST = Stakeholder Theory; SC = Social Capital Theory; IAD = Institutional Analysis and Development

* Used mean importance for analysis of Questions 4-8

One benefit of using multiple theories and a postdisciplinary approach is that it precludes the omission of items of great importance to respondents. For example, ‘decision makers directly involved in the partnership’ (Table 3) has the highest mean importance of all the partner-related elements and it is solely informed by EDR theory. If EDR had not been used as a theoretical basis, this item would have been overlooked. Even if a two theory combination such as IAD and SC had been used to produce an instrument of 40 of the 44 items used in the current study to capture partnership features, those items omitted may be of great importance to respondents as perceived contributors to successful partnerships. A multi-theoretical approach, drawing on IAD, EDR and SC as a bare minimum, is therefore recommended.

Benefits are also likely to accrue from using additional theories. For example, NT provides promising insights into how linkages between partners affect the success or otherwise of partnerships. The use of more rather than fewer theories, within the choice bounded by a researcher’s cognitive abilities, offers the promise of a richer picture and understanding of partnerships research as an interdisciplinary pursuit. These findings support the ‘crystallisation’ approach to research design, advocated by Richardson (2000), which leaves it open to researchers to examine issues and interests from multiple perspectives (i.e. as through a multi-faceted crystal). Janesick (2003: 67) regards the ‘incorporation of various disciplines’ to inform the research process as an example of crystallisation, as would a multi-theoretical design.

Most of the items in Tables 1 and 2 are underpinned by two or more theories, especially features (Table 1) such as power sharing and many of the process-related features and outcomes (Table 2) such as (1) shared benefits from the partnership, (2) stimulation of innovative approaches, (3) improved understanding of protected area values and (4) increased local community engagement. This result reflects the rich theoretical history of these factors. Power, for example, remains of fundamental interest to scholars examining partnerships from many disciplines (e.g. Brinkerhoff, 2002b; Himmelman, 1996), while process-related features have been of great interest to those working in EDR (e.g. Bingham, 1986; Todd, 2001). Such features, as considered by those working in the dispute resolution field, are themselves drawn from multiple theoretical perspectives. Finally, drawing on more than one theory in developing individual items is illustrative of postdisciplinarity.

Development and use of these items relied on integrating ideas from different theoretical perspectives, without being constrained by theoretical boundaries.

Support for this approach is illustrated by the case of the IAD framework, given that it underpinned, virtually to the exclusion of other theoretical perspectives, risk management and legal and administrative arrangements as context-related features. This contribution is important on two counts. First, it illustrates the value of bringing this theoretical perspective to tourism partnerships, especially given recent evidence and criticism that the context and associated administrative arrangements have not been fully considered in previous tourism partnerships research (Buckley & Sommer, 2001; Laing *et al.*, 2008). Second, over the last decade scholars have suggested the importance of IAD thinking in helping to explain partnering (Imperial, 1999; Leach & Pelkey, 2001). It is therefore timely to bring this thinking across into sustainable tourism research.

Conclusion

Through the questionnaire development and subsequent analyses, this paper has identified and confirmed the multi-theoretical richness that underpins partnership research. This could arguably be an artefact of researcher selection, however, the omnipresence of some theories against numerous items and the sheer number of theories suggests that theoretical richness, as much as researcher enthusiasm, drove the results. This richness also exposed a plethora of items that may not have been revealed without the multi-theoretical and postdisciplinary approach taken in this study.

Of particular interest from these findings is the overlap and synergies between theories, especially EDR and SC. These theories have very different origins, including environmental science and the social sciences, and having such overlaps strengthens the reliability and credibility of the items they inform. Their overlap with IAD emphasises the latter's great value in furthering knowledge about successful partnering. Both these contributions – overlap and originality – assist in operationalising the constructs integral to a better understanding of the influences on successful partnerships as well as interpreting the findings.

The current study suggests that the selection of items for use in future research should be multi-theoretically driven. The item set is best informed by a suite of theories capturing multi-theoretical possibilities and constructed with postdisciplinarity as an overt intent. Within any category of items (such as partner-related ones), there may be more contribution by one theory or a particular mix of theories. For example, EDR, SC and IAD underpin many of the process-related features and both general and sustainable tourism outcomes, while IAD has a strong presence in relation to the context-related features.

In identifying and discussing the most important features and outcomes of sustainable tourism partnerships associated with protected areas, this paper has ascertained the utility of a postdisciplinary approach, drawing on multiple theories. Additionally, it has refined this multi-theoretical approach for future research use by identifying the key underpinning theories. Given the global attention being paid to partnerships and protected areas, every opportunity to improve research efforts and create better outcomes for protected areas, as well as for the partners that are committed to their sustainable future, must be made. This paper provides a much-needed platform for rapidly progressing both empirical and theoretical efforts in this critical area.

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ⁱ The colloquialism 'left field' is of American origin (linked to baseball) and indicates that something is unusual, unexpected or odd.