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Tourism policy making: the policymakers' perspectives.

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TOURISM POLICY MAKING:
THE POLICYMAKERS' PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

This research explores tourism policy making, from the perspectives of policy makers using grounded theory. It focuses on Leeds, a city in the North of England, which is characterized by its turbulent environment. The paper identifies themes around policy making, including low status, lack of clarity, uncertainty, lack of consensus and congruence and complexity. Its findings indicate policy making is essentially a social process, involving communication and negotiation between people in the context of wider change. It suggests a social conceptualization, and further research to investigate the communications involved in producing policy rather than the current research focus on the tangible outputs of the process such as a plan or a physical development.

Key Words: Policy, People, Communication, Negotiation

Biosketch

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INTRODUCTION

Public policy making is a social process involving communication between many people in a variety of different organizations.   These interactions are negotiated and constrained by other decision makers, reflecting wider societal features that shape the environment. In this research, tourism policy making is investigated from the perspectives of the people involved in the process to deepen understanding about its relational and contextual aspects. This approach draws attention towards the importance of interactions and communications between people as policy is developed and enacted, and is designed to encompass complexity, multiple perspectives, contradiction and change.

Institutional, stakeholder and network theory are considered briefly and their contribution to understanding is discussed. Historical analysis identifies the specific environment of the research and the contextual factors that have a key role in shaping policy. A research strategy underpinned by grounded theory is used to analyze interviews.   Key themes and characteristics are identified which are considered in the light of wider literature. Policy making is discussed in the context of rapid change, marginality, multiple connections, communication, intangibility, and contradiction. This research suggests further investigation into individuals' stories about how they interact together to develop and deliver policy may deepen understanding of the process.

Approaches to public policy

This paper reflects concerns that approaches to tourism planning overemphasize the process of making a plan as a guide for making decisions for the future. In this research the term policy is used to reflect a broader understanding of the political, societal and human context of public sector led decision making. A policy conceptualization includes those interactions and processes associated with making policies, and the continual negotiations required to enact them.   It focuses attention on the environment, the interaction between different initiatives and the various actors in the process.

The literature is influenced by a number of disciplines and is characterized by a multiplicity of different conceptualizations, approaches and techniques. Researchers have considerable scope to choose between different approaches, drawing from more established fields on the basis of the environment, the nature of the problem and, to an extent, the education and values of the researcher.

A number of researchers including Farrell and Twining-Ward (2004); Kerr et al (2001); Pforr (2005) and Russell and Faulkner (1999) claim that dominant approaches to understanding are developed from the rational paradigm. They claim these approaches are reductionist, producing thin description that ignores the dynamics within the environment and have not provided the analytical tools to investigate context. Bramwell (2006); Dredge (2006); Dredge and Jenkins (2003); Elliott, (1997);Tyler and Dinan (2001a and b) and Thomas and Thomas (1998) use wider theory to focus attention on the environment, the interaction between different initiatives, the networks and communications between the people involved in the process and the political nature of policy making. These approaches encompass debates about the social context within which policies are made and examine relationships between contextual aspects rather than the detailed techniques and methods involved in the preparation of a plan.

Institutional approaches are developed from the perception that public policy is made within political and public institutions which structure and constrain its nature and dimensions. Institutional analysis has been used by researchers including Dredge and Jenkins (2003); Elliott, (1997) and Tyler and Dinan (2001a and b) and draws attention to formal rules and traditions, uncovering different conventions and procedures. It highlights the complex characteristics of policy making, drawing attention to the environment, which is characterized by organizational fragmentation, with policies being framed simultaneously within different areas. Treuren and Lane (2003) claim the contribution of the institutional and organizational literature in theory development has been its role in questioning rationality, deterministic thinking (i.e. the idea that organizations develop and implement policies to minimize costs and optimize returns) and normative thinking such as in the process models (e.g. Veal 2002) where policies are developed and then implemented. However institutional analysis has been criticized for underplaying the political and social processes (John 1998).

Stakeholder and network approaches reflect concerns that some research is too rational and not applicable to the real world. Stakeholder approaches highlight the "plurality of organizational interest groups and the political nature of organizational goal setting and policy implementation" (Treuren and Lane 2003:4). Network approaches focus on "policy communities" made up of people who interact within networks. They analyze from the perspective of the people who are involved in the process and recognize that "policy emerges as a result of informal patterns of association" considering the dynamics of "complex relationships" by examining them "as they shift and change" (John 1998:91). Network theory helps to "explain the complexity of the policy arena and the multi-

dimensional nature of it" (Tyler and Dinan 2001b: 243). However it is criticized by John (1998) who contends that networks need to be linked to other factors such as interests, ideas and institutions which determine how networks function. Bramwell (2006); Dredge (2006) and Bramwell and Meyer (2007) have developed approaches that consider networks in their social contexts. For example Bramwell (2006) takes an 'actor perspective' to investigate the interactions between different groups involved in the debates about development in Malta. His study aims to develop understanding from the perspectives of people making links between their views, actions and their social context. Dredge (2006) claims there has been increased interest in the network approach in the past decade arising from the increasing complexity of the environment and the proliferation of cross sector partnerships to develop and deliver policies.

There is a growing body of research that supports the idea of the use of multiple approaches to understand policy making. Dredge and Jenkins (2003) draw upon ideas from exchange and resource dependency theory, social and economic theory and institutional theory to explore relations between different layers of government. Treuren and Lane (2003) combine theories about organizations, institutional structures, stakeholders, ideology, economics and sustainability to develop a framework for analysis. Tyler and Dinan (2001a, b) draw from network theory, institutional theory, political theory and chaos theory highlighting the complexity of tourism, which crosses different sectors of the economy and involves a wide range of relationships. John (1998) and Pforr (2005) argue that single approaches fail to explain change, offer partial accounts of political action and lack analytical capability. They claim that when approaches are combined they can begin to account for complexity, dynamism and change. Most recently Bramwell and Meyer (2007) suggest a relational approach to policy making which takes account of power and context and develops a holistic approach drawing together theories and approaches that have previously been fractured or polarized.

DEVELOPING AN APPROACH TO TAKE ACCOUNT OF THE VIEWS OF POLICY MAKERS

Jafari (1987) and Kerr et al (2001) recommend case specific studies to develop thick description and improve understanding in a specific context rather than attempting to develop universal models. Case studies can include investigation into the irrational and less tangible aspects of policy making. They can reflect upon the wider political context within which decisions are made and draw attention to the power inequalities that are embedded in society, moving away from the consensual conceptualizations that characterize rationalist

approaches. Dredge (2006); Dredge and Jenkins (2003); Hope and Klemm (2001); Kerr et al. (2001); Ladkin and Bertramini (2002); Pforr (2005); Stevenson and Lovatt (2001); Thomas and Thomas (1998) and Treuren and Lane (2003) highlight the extent to which specific contexts and relationships generate a variety of different approaches to policy making. Agarwal (1999); Bramwell (2006); Bramwell and Meyer (2007) and Kerr et al (2001) recognize the importance of people in process and their research supports a social conceptualization.

The case study

A case study approach fits well with a study which is developed from the views of policy makers. The researcher drew from the literature outlined in the previous section to interrogate the themes that emerged during the study. The City of Leeds was selected as an appropriate case study for this research on the basis that it had a history of tourism policy making and service provision (since 1977), a written strategy, a budget and dedicated staff and decision makers who were willing to participate in further research.   Leeds is located in the North of England, is the capital of Yorkshire and the Humber Region and is the second largest Metropolitan District in England. As traditional industries declined, in the 1970's, the Local Authority (LA), Leeds City Council, sought to diversify the City's employment base including the development and promotion of its image as a destination. The area was identified by Buckley and Witt (1989) as a city in a "difficult area" to develop tourism.

Leeds is the largest centre of economic activity in the region, and has a diverse and rapidly growing economy. Its tourism industry has developed rapidly in the past fifteen years, supported by the development of hotels, attractions and leisure facilities. According to research in 2006 by the Yorkshire Tourist Board "the overall value of tourism in Leeds was an estimated £639 million (m), supporting in excess of 13,000 full time jobs (LCC 2007). The difficulties in estimating day visitors are demonstrated in the fluctuations in estimates of such visits which are shown at 10.26 m in 2006 down from 18.4m in 2003 with a corresponding decrease in revenue from £546m to £308m. The staying visitor market is estimated to have generated £188.6m in 2003 rising to £288m in 2006 (LCC 2003 & 2007).

There is a hierarchy of policies that guide the strategic development of Leeds. At the top of the hierarchy is the 'Vision for Leeds', (1999-2009 and 2004-2020), which sets out the strategic direction of the LA. Beneath lie seven 'daughter' strategies, which are intended to deliver different aspects of the 'Vision' (the Cultural Strategy is the relevant strategy for tourism). Below each of the daughter strategies are a third tier of 'grand-daughter' strategies

including the Tourism Strategy (hereafter called the Strategy). Tourism objectives are also delivered through a wide range of policies and plans outside the visioning process.   The LA's support and engagement in tourism has been inconsistent over the past 29 years, with services being developed under different mainstream policy and service areas. Stevenson (2005) identifies five phases characterized by activity at the beginning, followed by setback and relative inactivity at the end of each phase. There is a continued lack of clarity about the role and remit of tourism services and it is difficult to separate them from other LA activities.

The context – governance and modernization

Governance is a term used to describe the public policy making process. It draws attention to the changing role of government and the broader structures, institutions and processes. It is characterized by changing relations between the public and private sector and between the state at different levels (Richards and Smith 2002). Research into governance considers the plethora of agencies and changing power arrangements associated with developing and implementing public policies (Midwinter 2001; Richards and Smith 2002; Stoker 2004; Stoker and Wilson 2004). The change from local government involving direct provision of services to the more complex arrangements associated with local governance began in Britain in 1979 when the 'New Right' Thatcher government was elected. It was influenced by 'neo-liberalism' an ideological perspective drawing from ideas developed by Adam Smith and the classical economists, which was a laissez fair liberalism with an advocacy of market systems. The New Right were concerned about the role and effectiveness of the state within a rapidly changing and complex environment and sought to improve efficiency and effectiveness (Hambleton et al 1995; Stoker and Wilson 2004).

In Britain by the 1990's there was broad consensus that public services reform was necessary and that government should be less involved with directly providing services and more involved in strategic leadership (Giddens 1998:6). The modernization agenda is the latest iteration of public service reform. It includes policies to engender more collaboration and partnership working, curbs on local government spending, improved integration of policies, developing citizenship under the 'democratic renewal' agenda and changes to the management and leadership of LAs (Midwinter 2001). Changes associated with governance and modernization mean that LA policy is developed in a context that is turbulent and in the process of rapid and fundamental change. The modernization agenda has been characterized by contradictory tensions between its different aspects. For example modernization has led to increased regulation and control over LAs by national government and has reduced their discretion to deliver local services. However the modernization

agenda also seeks to develop local democracy, which implies that the LAs should have more power to develop and deliver policies (Leach 2004 and Richards and Smith 2002). The modernization agenda is associated with the rise of the regions in policy making which is increasingly important in setting the context for LA activity. Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) are concerned with economic development and delivery and are particularly important to the case study as the strategic leadership for tourism was devolved to them in 2003 (DCMS, 2002). This has led to turbulence and uncertainty as RDA structures and policies emerge and develop.

With the exception of Burns (2003) and Thomas and Thomas (1998) there has been little discussion about ideology or the impacts of governance and modernization in the tourism literature. The wider literature on policy, ideology and politics in Britain (including Giddens 1998; Hambleton et al.1995; Hill 1997; John 1998; Midwinter 2000; Richards and Smith 2002; Stoker and Wilson 2004) reveals a lack of ideological thought or debate relating to tourism policy. In Britain it is difficult to connect tourism policies with rightist or leftist ideology because ideological considerations do not clearly underpin the actions of government. However the changes arising from governance, modernization and third way ideology are important to this research as they affect the context in which decisions are made.

Policy at the national level

Historical analysis of national approaches to tourism (drawing from Jeffreys 2001 and Tyler and Dinan 2001a, b) identifies the main characteristics of policy at the national level. These include the predominance of economic approaches, continued low status, organizational change and the growth of partnerships with the private sector. Its low status in England is evidenced by the scant legislative framework for the development and delivery of policies and services. It has remained a "sub" departmental area during the past 30 years and has been characterized by the reliance on sub state agencies. There have been frequent changes in lead department and organizational fragmentation with responsibility split between nine departments in 2001 (Tyler and Dinan 2001a). More recently the environment has become more complex and turbulent with a variety of partnership arrangements to develop and deliver policies creating increasingly varied power relationships.

Policy at the local level

LAs are involved in a broad range of tourism activities including promotion, the provision of visitor information, policy making, visitor and attraction management and development, creation of destination based fora, and private/public partnerships. Indirect activities include infrastructure and service provision that impacts upon visitors and their overall experience (Richards, 1991 and Stevenson and Lovatt, 2001). Governance and modernization have changed the context of LA service provision but have not had a major direct impact on their engagement in tourism service provision which continues to be discretionary, minimally funded and delivered on the margins of larger service areas. Research by Buckley and Witt (1985, 1989), Hope and Klemm (2001), Richards (1991), Stevenson and Lovatt (2001), and Thomas and Thomas (1998) identify this marginality and the extent that the engagement in tourism activity and service provision are subject to local interpretation. In the absence of a strong lead from national government, LAs have an unusual degree of freedom to define and develop policy.

English LAs take a wide variety of approaches to tourism, their objectives are articulated through a range of plans and strategies with different foci and the environment is characterized by its messiness and complexity. LAs are involved in the preparation of tourism strategies, and a range of other strategies and plans which cover some of its aspects such as cultural strategies and economic development strategies. They are increasingly working in partnerships, to carry out activities, which has led to "a huge range of non predictable, evolving relationships" (Tyler and Dinan 2001a:211) and increased the importance of bargaining and negotiation between people in a variety of organizations in the public and private sectors. The complexity and variety of approaches highlights the difficulty in adopting a research approach that relies on a single or simple conceptualization or that makes a-priori assumptions.

Study Methods

The conceptualization of policy as a social activity, emerging from human action and interaction, has implications for the design of research strategy. The strategy for this study is influenced by grounded theory, which provides a systematic procedure for collecting and analyzing qualitative data. It is a methodology with 'positivist rigor' and enables the researcher to build theory from the 'bottom-up' from the actions, words and behavior of the people under study. Grounded theory recognizes the importance of people in "shaping the

worlds they live in through the process of symbolic interaction" and the interrelationship between peoples' perceptions and action. It emphasizes the need to, "get out in the field" (Glaser 1992:16), study phenomena using the perspectives or voice of those studied; collect and analyze data simultaneously and refine theory using a wider range of data including policy documents and secondary material (Glaser and Strauss 1968; Goulding 2002).

In grounded theory coding strategies are adopted as a way of breaking down interviews and other appropriate data into "distinct units of meaning" (Goulding, 2002:74). Coding conceptualizes "data by constant comparison of incident with incident, and incident with concept, to emerge more categories and their properties" (Glaser 1992:38). The first stage of this process, 'open coding', aims to open up the interview data by fragmenting it, identifying concepts and uses constant comparison to scrutinize the data for every meaning (Glaser, 1992). Constant comparison is "the exploration of similarities and differences across incidents in data" (Goulding, 2002:169) and occurs where incidents are coded for properties and categories that connect them (Glaser, 1992). Initial codes are labeled "to generate concepts" which are "clustered into descriptive categories" (Goulding 2002:74). Once concepts have been identified they are analyzed in more depth and are grouped under more abstract "higher order" concepts (Strauss & Corbin 1998:95). At this stage incidents are compared to incidents recalled from experience, memos written during the data collection and analysis process, and from the literature. This "systematic comparison" sensitizes the researcher to properties and dimensions in the data that might have been overlooked (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Axial coding is described by Goulding (2002:169) as "a more sophisticated method of coding data which seeks to identify incidents which have a relationship to each other." Axial coding is an important method to achieve a higher level of abstraction that aims to lead to an appreciation of dynamic interrelationships between concepts (Glaser,1992; Goulding, 2002). Axial coding begins the process of "reassembling data that were fractured during open coding" (Strauss & Corbin 1998:123-4). At this stage the descriptive codes become subsumed into a higher order category which unites "the theoretical concepts to offer an explanation or theory of the phenomenon" (Goulding, 2002:169).

The research area is characterized by a complex web of relationships and a range of tangible and intangible factors. Fonseca (2002); Medd (2001); Mitleton Kelly and Subhan (2002); Stacey (2003); and Shaw (2002) argue that complex social phenomena are affected by a range of factors, many of which are not tangible. They use qualitative approaches to try to describe and interpret these phenomena.   They focus attention on people highlighting the

importance of communication, conversations and story telling as a way of developing knowledge about change in the social sphere. The blending of grounded theory with ideas from these researchers provides a research strategy that focuses on the societal context, communications and human behaviors that shape the policy process. The strategy enables consideration of the multiplicity of voices of the interviewees and adds depth, meaning, and reflexivity. It is developed in the knowledge that any theory arising from this study will be context specific, although it may have resonance in a wider setting.

Collecting the data

The research strategy involved the adoption of a series of semi-structured interviews around a series of broad topics. 'Snowball' sampling (Patton 2002) was adopted as a way of identifying people with a key role in developing and delivering tourism policy. Initially the Tourism Manager (hereafter called the Manager) was interviewed and identified people that she worked closely with, including councilors, officers, the director of the local strategic partnership and her contacts in the regional organizations. These people were then interviewed and also asked to identify key people. This meant the list of interviewees was based upon the data collected in the field rather than any pre-conceived notions about the relevant people. The interviewees included policy makers at the local level including three councilor's, (the Leader of the Council, the Deputy Leader and the councilor with responsibility for tourism), the director of the local strategic partnership, managers of Corporate Services, Policy and Regeneration, the Policy and Projects team, tourism and the planning officer with a responsibility for tourism. At the regional level the Director of the Yorkshire Tourist Board (YTB) and two tourism managers in Yorkshire Forward were interviewed. In depth interviews were carried out twice in 2004 and 2005, however in this period changes in the leadership of the Council and in staffing over the study period meant that several of the key policy makers changed. Snowball sampling in the second year enabled the researcher to identify the new grouping of key people. A total of twelve people, (six women and six men) were interviewed over the two years and, ten interviews were undertaken each year. These interviews were recorded to enable the researcher to establish rapport, to probe and clarify issues as they emerged and to revisit this information during the research process.

The interviewees were asked to identify the issues and interactions influencing the policy process in their experience.   Their responses usually led to reflections about key people, the place of tourism within the LA, the political will to engage in tourism, the networks and joint arrangements to deliver policies but where they did not cover all of these areas the

interviewer made a broad inquiry into that aspect. At the end of each interview the interviewee was asked if there were any other important issues that had not been discussed, enabling them to broaden out the frame of reference and introduce new themes.

The second phase of interviews aimed to clarify and elaborate ideas discussed at the first meeting and to identify new issues and themes that had emerged during the year. It was loosely structured around the researcher's conceptualization of themes identified in the first stage interviews. Interviewees were invited to discuss and comment on the themes and other interpretations arising from these interviews. This enabled reflection between the researcher and interviewee and provided opportunities to revise interpretations so that interpretation of data was a two way process. In this way the researcher moved between inductive open-ended encounters with interviewees to ascertain the dimensions of the study and more deductive attempts to theme ideas.

Analyzing the data

The interviews were transcribed to re-engage with their content, which enabled thoughts and concepts to develop. Segments of text were color coded and line-by-line analysis was used to identify key words or phrases to develop coding categories.   Manual analysis enabled the researcher to repeatedly revisit and immerse herself in the data, recoding and capturing patterns or themes as they emerged. Memos were written to map ideas, refine concepts, identify relationships in the data and to note ideas outside of the data. The transcripts, tapes and the memos were reviewed regularly to enable reflection upon incidents occurring across the data. Open coding was used to break down data into distinct units of meaning and these units were then labeled to generate concepts.   Patterns, recurring events and shared experiences were noted and axial coding was then used to cluster concepts that were relevant. Constant comparative analysis enabled the researcher to develop the codes further as the process continued, which directed further data collection (Glaser 1978; Goulding 2002; Strauss and Corbin 1998).

The findings were written up as two narratives, reflecting the phases of research and bringing together themes and characteristics using the experience, definitions and understanding of those involved in the process. The narrative approach was used to make connections and create meaning to develop a story. It fitted with the social conceptualization, explicitly involving the researcher as a narrator in the story and enabling the study of the dynamic of the process in a way that acknowledged its complexity and its environment (Flyvbjerg 1998; Mitleton Kelly and Subhan 2002).   The narrative approach enabled the

researcher to discuss her findings and ideas within the context of multiple interpretations of data (Stacey 2003), rather than presenting consensus around her ideas and reflected the depth and richness of the interviewees' experiences.

After the narratives were written a formal literature review took place, drawing on existing ideas and refining the emerging theory further. The decision to undertake a literature review at this late stage reflects the need to disconnect from the literature in order to develop a perspective reflecting the interviewees' experiences (Glaser 1998).   It was necessary for the themes and characteristics to have some substance before comparing with other studies and established notions and theory about policy development. The literature review was used to conceptually connect the emerging theory from the interviewees' to existing theory in the field. The narratives were then refined on the basis of the literature and the findings written up.

Findings

The next section is developed from the narratives and identifies two core characteristics and six themes. These are evaluated in the context of the literature identified earlier in this paper and historical analysis in England and in Leeds. The core characteristics arising in the interviews are constant change, and communication. The turbulence of the environment in Leeds is illustrated by the interviewees, who identify changes in the political leadership and in key personnel between 2004 and 2005. There are also changes in the approach to policy development and delivery including the introduction of a new organization to market the City and developments at the regional level. As a result of this rapid change, there is a divergence between the stated mechanisms for delivering policies and those experienced by the interviewees. There is also a divergence between the sustainability and regeneration objectives stated in the Strategy and the experience of the interviewees who claim the service is focused on front line services and marketing.

The interviewees emphasize the importance of interactions and negotiations between decision makers in different sectors in the development and delivery of policy, highlighting different associations of people involved. They identify the formal and informal mechanisms for communicating the Strategy, indicating that the strength and position of the champion(s) and their ability to influence other decision makers has a major effect on the development and implementation of policies. Six themes emerged across the data which are bound together, overlap and are characterized by their indistinct or 'fuzzy' boundaries.

Low status

The provision of tourism policies and services is a discretionary activity for the LA which contributes to its low status and minimal budget. The implications of low status include minimal local research, a lack of strategic awareness, disconnection from wider LA policies, difficulty for the Manager to influence key people and inactivity in the context of rapid change. In Leeds, tourism policy is driven by officers, rather than elected representatives, is of marginal political interest and falls outside mainstream political debate.

Low status is particularly relevant to an understanding of tourism policy making in England where changes in the wider environment have disproportionately impacted upon discretionary services (Thomas and Thomas, 1998). The modernization agenda has increased pressure to improve the delivery of statutory services. This has refocused politicians' attention away from discretionary services particularly those that are largely outside the local democratic process (tourists do not live in the area, do not vote and often do not directly contribute to the cost of LA services). The lack of reference to tourism in the wider literature on governance, modernization and political ideology in the U.K. highlights its marginality and low status as an area of government activity. This marginality is a characteristic of a wide range of LAs in the U.K. and is evident in the research by Richards (1991); Stevenson and Lovatt (2001) and Stevenson (2002.

Lack of clarity

There is a lack of clarity in Leeds about the role of the LA in developing and delivering tourism policy and about how it should fit with other priorities. This is strongly linked with its low status and the under representation of tourism interests in the most influential decision making groups. For example the Manager is not involved in the group overseeing the implementation of the Cultural Strategy, which means key decision makers are not briefed on implementation and the contribution of tourism to the economy. The lack of clarity about the nature, place and role of tourism policy in England is evident from surveys (Richards 1991; Stevenson and Lovatt 2001). It is illustrated at a theoretical level by the diversity of approaches and theories to conceptualize policy making including Bramwell and Sharman (1999); Bramwell (2006); Burns (2003); Dredge and Jenkins (2003); Elliott (1997); Farrell and Twining-Ward (2004); Pforr (2005); and Treuren and Lane (2002).

Uncertainty

In Leeds there is uncertainty in the context of rapid change in the local and regional environment. The arrangements for delivering services continue to change as a consequence of the new leadership, organizational developments and regional changes. The interviewees are uncertain about what will happen in the next few months and how the LA will engage in tourism policy and service delivery in the future. They are not sure whether this service will be contracted out and whether they as individuals will continue to be involved. In this context they can only deliver services on a short term, reactive basis and strategic or long term thinking is in abeyance until decisions are made at a higher level.

Lack of consensus

The interviews in Leeds illustrate the lack of consensus around the development and delivery of policy, drawing attention to shifts in power and the implications of lack of power in the process. For example, LA hostility to the regional proposals for sub regional delivery structures led to a reorientation of regional policy between the interviews in 2004-5, with some decision-making powers being shifted to the LA. While a mutually acceptable approach has been agreed, the lack of consensus during the process has led to mistrust and relatively infrequent communication between regional and local players. Also within Leeds the development of a city-wide marketing organization has been characterized by a lack of consensus about detailed implementation, leading to poor communication and indecision. In both these cases there are winners and losers in negotiations. At a wider level these findings are supported by research by Bramwell and Sharman (1999); Elliott (1997); Ladkin and Bertramini (2002); Treuren and Lane (2003); Thomas and Thomas (1998); and Tyler and Dinan (2001b) who illustrate the extent that policy is enacted within a contested arena with different groups of people vying for position.

Lack of congruence

There is a lack of congruence between the various initiatives and policies that impact upon tourism. There are four layers of regional organization that deliver policy including the Northern Way (a grouping of three Regional Development Agencies (RDAs)), the region (the RDA and Regional Tourist Board), the West Yorkshire sub region and the Leeds City Region. These organizations have different boundaries, in some respects appear to duplicate and contradict one another and there is uncertainty arising from the conflicting agendas of the various programmers. Policy makers in Leeds recognize the tensions between the initiatives and the contradictions arising as they attempt to comply and engage with different programmers. These tensions lead to a situation where local politicians have a

key role in choosing how enthusiastically they will engage in different initiatives. For example, in Leeds, there is evidence of more enthusiasm at the local level for the City Region and less for sub regional delivery structures. At the local level there is also a lack of congruence between the organizational structure and the policy hierarchy for tourism. Recent organizational changes have moved tourism from Leisure Services (with a direct role in delivering the Cultural Strategy) to Development Services (with a direct role in delivering regeneration plans and strategies).   This has disconnected the service from the formal mechanisms for delivery and implementation.

Complexity

The complexity of tourism policy making arises partly from the five themes outlined above but they do not fully encompass the attributes that make it complex. It is complex because it operates across a wide range of traditional service areas and serves people who do not participate in the local democratic process. It has fuzzy boundaries, spanning diverse areas and requiring multiple connections to be made across organizations and plans. Complexity is intensified in the current period of change at the local and regional level and this exacerbates the lack of clarity and uncertainty about the service. There are so many new initiatives affecting tourism in Leeds that it is difficult to understand their implications and to maintain the stability required to implement and evaluate policies.

Leeds is characterized by complexity at all levels. At the local level this is illustrated by the variety of departments and organizations that provide services and make policies with a tourism element, the constant change in roles and responsibilities and the uncertainty about where it fits. This is exacerbated by the multitude of changing roles and relationships between private and public sector organizations in the local strategic partnership and the development of a separate organization to market the City in 2005. At the regional level there is complexity arising from the changes in delivery structures, policies and plans. This has been exacerbated by rapid changes in the staffing altering the network of relationships between decision makers.

Implications of findings

The implications of the findings of this study are discussed below under six headings which draw together the characteristics and themes arising in the interview data.

Tourism policy takes place in a rapidly changing and dynamic environment

The combination of modernization, governance and third way ideology, means that policy is made and enacted in a context that is turbulent, competitive and dynamic. At the local level this dynamism is illustrated by reorganization, changes in personnel and new initiatives. There is a connection between developments in the regional and national environment and the local environment but these developments are sometimes contradictory and connections are complex and difficult to envisage. Policy research should therefore be developed within a theoretical framework that recognizes and investigates its characteristics and contradictions. Further research should consider the process of change and its implications over time to illustrate the dynamic power shifts in the networks of people who influence and enact local policies.

Tourism policy is essentially about communication

The wider literature on complexity (Fonseca, 2002; Shaw, 2002; Stacey 2003) stresses the extent to which policy making is a "soft" intuitive human process rather than a rational scientific process. This is supported by Bramwell and Meyer (2007) and the interviewees who identify the key role of communication and negotiation between people in the process. The implication of this continuous negotiation is that policy is constantly changing, is open to varied interpretation and cannot be "fixed" or clearly defined.

In Leeds people negotiate the shape and place of tourism policy and their interactions are very relevant to its ongoing practice and development, whereas its tangible elements are not important. When the interviewees discuss tourism they do not refer to the published strategy but talk about the specific arrangements and initiatives in the recent past, the present and near future. They refer to the implicit links with the higher objectives and the approaches adopted by the people involved in the process. The lack of importance of the Strategy to policy makers raises questions about the relevance of research approaches that focus on producing formal strategy. It implies further research should be undertaken to understand the networks, communications and interactions surrounding policy and to develop theory that takes account of the experiences and views of those involved in the process.

Tourism takes place on the margins of LA policy making

In England tourism lies on the margins of LA policy making (Stevenson and Lovatt, 2001), and is not explicitly addressed in the wider literature or debates (such as Giddens 1998, Stoker and Wilson, 2004). Its marginality arises from its discretionary nature, a lack of clarity

about what it is and how it fits with other more established areas, and a lack of interest from the local electorate and local politicians. The research indicates that the Manager does not have a powerful voice in partnerships and is not sufficiently senior in the organizational hierarchy to influence wider decisions. The most important characteristics affecting policy making are outside her control and she is relatively powerless in the process. The low status of tourism in relation to other service areas suggests further investigation using wider literature on power and exploring the implications of lack of power.

Tourism is intricately connected and cannot be separated from other policy areas

This study set out to focus on tourism policy but the findings in Leeds, suggest it does not have clear boundaries and is developed and delivered by a number of organizations in partnership. There is a lack of clarity about where it fits and how it feeds into the higher level Vision. Its marginality and lack of congruence means that in practice it does not clearly link into any of the LA's mainstream activities. These findings are supported by research by Richards (1991), Stevenson and Lovatt (2001) and Thomas and Thomas (1998) indicating the diversity of approaches to policy making taken by LAs and their varied partners.

The enactment of tourism policy is not confined within a specific service or organizational area and it is the result of a large number of different decisions made at local, regional and national level. Many of these are not directed specifically at tourism but have significant impacts on policy development and delivery e.g. the modernization agenda and the development of cultural strategies in the early 2000's. In Leeds tourism is intricately connected and intertwined with other areas which suggests, that it makes little sense for it to be conceptualized as a separate activity. Studies need to be developed which take account of its varied, overlapping and sometimes indistinct boundaries and understand how those arrangements work rather than taking it out of its context and creating boundaries with other areas.

Contradictory tensions are inherent in the environment and in the process itself

The research highlights tensions and contradictions, showing that the most easily identifiable parts of policy making are not necessarily the most important. For example in Leeds formal, planning involving the production of the Strategy, had a negligible role in the development of the tourism sector which grew in response to changes in the economy as a whole. The Strategy did not exist until 2002 and by 2005, was forgotten by the interviewees who discuss delivery in terms of the higher level Vision. One interpretation might be that tourism

developed successfully without policy and does not need to be managed. However historical analysis (Stevenson 2005) and the interviews with policy makers indicate considerable informal activity in the period where no formal strategy existed. The interviewees indicate that the tangible policies within formally adopted plans are far less important in enacting change than those intangible and unwritten policies and practices that evolve during the interactions and negotiations between decision makers.

Another visible change occurs when the political leadership in Leeds changes for the first time in 24 years in 2004. The election of a new leadership would appear to imply change, however in practice, the strategic vision, and tourism policy objectives have remained the same because the partnership organization secured cross party agreement to the Vision. Despite the apparent alternatives provided through party-based representative democracy a major visible change has minimal implications on the development and enactment of policy.

The Leeds study also shows the continuing tensions that arise in negotiations between people and between the different policies and initiatives at the local, regional and national level. The tensions between these multiple factors are dynamic, complex and unpredictable and require research to be developed in a way that recognizes and takes account of them.

The tangible components of policy are not necessarily the most important

In Leeds the Strategy provides a clear and tangible manifestation of policy but by 2005 it was largely forgotten. The interviewees emphasized the importance of the ambiguous and less tangible aspects or what Darwin (2001) calls 'backstage activity' which includes the interactions, and the power and politics of policy making. In the view of the interviewees the most important developments and the negotiations are those that are emerging and are not formalized within documents or plans. These include the negotiations around the development of an organization to market Leeds, the decision to freeze the Manager's post and the lack of consensus and negotiation around the regional proposals. These are the most important enactments of policy but very little is written about them and they are relatively intangible outside of the network.

CONCLUSION

This research contributes to current theoretical debates by presenting a challenge to the way in which policy making is conceptualized with the aim of improving understanding of policy in its complex, turbulent and social environment. It seeks to understand policy development

from the perspectives of policy makers and to make links between their views and actions in a way that takes account of their social context. By placing people at the center of the investigation it emphasizes the communications and social interactions that are fundamental to the process. It contributes to methodological debates by developing an approach that draws from grounded theory, encompassing the intricacies and multiple perspectives associated with human activity within a social world. It identifies characteristics and themes and then discusses these in the frame of wider contextual considerations.

In Leeds, tourism policy spans a range of areas and organizations, lacks clarity and status and occurs in a dynamic environment. As a result of its complexity is it is not easy to unpick and unpack the most important components and relationships. It is difficult to understand who is really making decisions and this research suggests the answers might lie in the stories about how individuals interact and work together. This suggests that stories about informal relationships, interests and rivalries might give much better insights into how people exert power and have more capacity to explain what happens in practice than the study of the more tangible processes and techniques involved in preparing a plan.

This research has been developed from the belief that policy making is a social process, involving interaction, negotiation and collaboration between people. It recognizes the importance of people and investigates the factors and circumstances affecting policy in Leeds from their perspectives. It is concerned with documenting and analyzing the 'realities' of policy making from the perspectives of the policy maker and developing understanding from the 'bottom-up'. It shows that the tangible outputs, such as written policies, say little about the realities of the process from the perspectives of the people involved. In Leeds the key issue for the Manager is how to negotiate with important decision makers to ensure that tourism issues are considered on the mainstream agenda.

The research is developed from the perspective that understanding of complex policy issues can be improved by building rich context specific studies that have a resonance with one another. While its direct findings are context specific, they provide another layer to the understanding of the complex social phenomena associated with policy making. If the findings have a wider resonance then it could be to point to the fact that studies that focus on the techniques and process of preparing a plan provide a limited or partial understanding. In Leeds the issue is not how to develop a tangible plan or document, but how to get tourism onto the local agenda. This suggests that research needs to be directed at developing a more detailed and coherent understanding of the communications between policy makers focusing on some of the problems they encounter and the power inequalities that occur in a

contested policy arena. Research is required to provide ideas and concepts to help tourism policy makers be more influential in a dynamic environment.

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