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# Exploring the antecedents of sustainable tourism development

Niall MacKenzie

Martin Joseph Gannon

Hunter Centre for Entrepreneurship, University of Strathclyde

## **EXPLORING THE ANTECEDENTS OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT**

### **Purpose:**

We use two historical case studies (UK and Costa Rica) to explore the antecedents and legitimization of sustainable development in hospitality and tourism, demonstrating the value of historical analysis through careful consideration of motivations, context, and development type under different circumstances.

### **Design:**

Utilizing government and private archival materials, oral history testimonies, industry reports and secondary literature, we deploy careful historical analysis of developing and developed country approaches to two cases of hospitality and tourism development and how this impacts on notions of sustainability.

### **Findings:**

Issues surrounding sustainability in hospitality and tourism are longstanding and impacted by their situated context. In considering ‘bottom-up’ and ‘top-down’ approaches, this study finds that the private-sector is critical in legitimizing tourism and hospitality development through addressing sustainability aims.

### **Research Implications:**

Issues faced in developing hospitality and tourism markets should not be taken in isolation and, by drawing upon historical cases, scholars can better-understand how developed tourism markets shape the sustainability of developing contexts.

### **Practical Implications:**

This study demonstrates how sustainability can be legitimized over time and in different contexts, in both government-led and business-led approaches, providing lessons for understanding the mechanisms by which to address these issues in future.

### **Value:**

Historical analyses in hospitality and tourism remain relatively few. This study illustrates the theoretical and practical value of historical analysis of the pathway to legitimacy for sustainable tourism development.

### **Keywords:**

History; Networks; Entrepreneurship; Ecotourism; Government-Business relations

## **Introduction**

Faced with concerns surrounding the impact wrought by unfettered tourism, the viability of maintaining seasonal hospitality-dependent economies and the commoditization or tempering of local culture (Bhati and Pearce, 2017; Nunkoo and Smith, 2013), the value of hospitality and tourism as a driver of sustainable development has gained traction in recent years, with the United Nations designating 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development (Job *et al.*, 2017). To this end, most research into sustainability within the sector is contemporaneous or forward-facing (Job *et al.*, 2017), yet recent work has considered the development and history of sustainable tourism by analysing the role of entrepreneurs in this process (Jones, 2017; Jones and Spadafora, 2017), in line with growing interest more generally in sustainable industries and consumption (Bergquist, 2017; Mowforth and Munt, 2015).

Recognising this, we employ historical analyses of two case studies to illuminate the antecedents of sustainable development by examining two very different, but now-sustainable tourism developments: Aviemore (UK) and Costa Rica. Consistent within this is an analysis of how both were established; the roles that government and entrepreneurs played in launching tourism and hospitality as sustainable industries; and the consequent importance of networks. Thus, this study enhances extant sustainability literature within the field of hospitality and tourism by adopting a novel historical perspective, using Andrews and Burke's (2007) 'five Cs' of historical theory (context, change over time, causality, complexity, and contingency) to analyse both cases and reveal the antecedent factors impacting upon sustainable and legitimate tourism development, meeting recent calls for such work (Perchard *et al.*, 2017). Historical perspectives have become increasingly common in contemporary business and management research due to their inherent ability to (1) reveal changes over time and (2) consider the applicability of existing theories to different temporal and spatial contexts simultaneously (Maclean *et al.*, 2016; Maclean *et al.*, 2017; Perchard *et al.*, 2017).

Buckley's review (2012) of the sustainable tourism literature charted the development of the field over the preceding two decades, identifying key texts and themes. Consistent within this is recognition of the difficulty of defining, quantifying, and accounting for sustainability in tourism. As such, there remains little consensus with regards to the exact characteristics of sustainable hospitality and tourism (Jones *et al.*, 2016). Indeed, the United

Nations Environmental Programme and World Trade Organisation (2005) ambiguously suggest sustainable tourism as being wide-ranging and entrenched in accountability for “future and current environmental, economic, and social impacts, as well as tourism that addresses environmental, host community, visitor, or industry needs” (Alonso *et al.*, 2018, p.813). Nonetheless, it can be reasoned that there are three crucial interconnected areas, each comprising a range of underlying factors and dynamics, which underpin sustainable hospitality and tourism: economic, environmental/ecological, and social sustainability (Littig and Griessler, 2005).

However, within the sector commitment to sustainability often remains underpinned by economic growth (Jones *et al.*, 2016). Here, the utility of focusing on developing initiatives geared towards environmental or social sustainability is debatable if such ventures cannot achieve long-term economic viability (Higham, 2007). Indeed, for policy-makers and environmental planners, the economic potential of sites or destinations is considered as the most obvious sustainability indicator (Kristjánsdóttir *et al.*, 2018). To this end, the potential economic benefits of tourism development are established. Sustainable hospitality and tourism initiatives can provide much-needed financial support to local communities (Dempsey *et al.*, 2011); improve infrastructure and facilities (Briassoulis, 2002); increase inward investment (Ko and Stewart, 2002); improve quality-of-life and living standards for locals (Chhabra, 2005). Therefore, the potential efficacy of tourism as an economic driver within lesser-developed regions is established (Higham, 2007). Nonetheless, while prevailing sentiment suggests that tourism can sustain emergent or developing economies, it may increase cost-of-living for locals (Ko and Stewart, 2002). Further, if manifest in an inappropriate fashion, tourism development can lead to long-term unsustainability as a result of resource extraction, environmental degradation, and ecological insensitivity (Loperena, 2017), suggesting that initial economic considerations are not always enough in the development of sustainable tourism initiatives without careful curation and management (Kuščer *et al.*, 2017).

A key progenitor of sustainable development is recognition that “the environment has an intrinsic value that outweighs its value as a tourism asset. Its enjoyment by future generations and its long-term survival must not be prejudiced by short-term considerations” (Chhabra, 2005, p.243). Thus, increased tourism may expedite the deterioration of natural resources, with destination sustainability further jeopardised by the inability to preserve

tangible heritage and the integrity of landmarks, architecture, and landscapes in the face of rapidly increasing tourist attention (Bhati and Pearce, 2017). This is of particular concern to destinations dependent on vulnerable ecological characteristics to stimulate tourism (Giglio *et al.*, 2018), or those in regions where extant infrastructure, legislation, and experience is not robust enough to accommodate the impact of an influx of visitors and the detrimental effect this can have on environmental sustainability (Hashemi and Ghaffary, 2017). While there has been a concerted move to safeguard and protect the ecological and natural characteristics of many sites and destinations within both the developed and developing world (He *et al.*, 2018), much of this is underpinned by tourist-recognition of their impact on the destinations they visit (Weaver and Jin, 2016). Nonetheless, addressing the in-situ ecological impact of tourist presence (Kuščer *et al.*, 2017), and certification schemes (He *et al.*, 2018) have stimulated a degree of success in promoting environmental sustainability in order to safeguard the longevity of destinations.

However, addressing environmental concerns does not embody ‘sustainability’ in-and-of itself, and is often contingent on other factors, such as social sustainability (Cuthill, 2010; Ye *et al.*, 2014). The social element of sustainable hospitality and tourism development is often overlooked, yet long-term economic development is only possible if emphasis is placed on meeting the needs of *both* visitors and locals, ensuring that the impact of increased traffic on the environment is not pervasive, and in maintaining destination authenticity by recognising the value of the indigenous culture, customs, and traditions throughout the development process (Curran *et al.*, 2018). In doing so, it is crucial that those involved in destination planning solicit the opinions of residents/locals and ensure the requirements of the community are reflected in the development process (Dempsey *et al.*, 2011). Further, the nature of communication and interaction between locals and inbound tourists is vital to the ongoing success and appeal of hospitality and tourism offerings (Taheri *et al.*, 2018). Sincere social interactions are critical in developing sustainability as, “without social interaction, people living in a given area can only be described as a group of individuals living separate lives, with little sense of community or sense of pride or place attachment” (Dempsey *et al.*, 2011, p.294).

Difficulty in developing tourism destinations is exacerbated due to the variety of key players (e.g., service providers, local government, national government, locals) required to combine to produce the competitive and engaging tourism offering needed to achieve

sustainability (Hassan, 2000). As such, the industry must recognise the extent of cooperation required to ensure this, not only at the initial development stage, but in maintaining each sustainability characteristic in a way that catalyses long-term success (Briassoulis, 2002). Indeed, the social, environmental, and economic elements of hospitality and tourism development combine to craft a difficult balance between rapid development and long-term sustainability. As such, while this interdependence is evident in sustainable tourism development (Nunkoo and Smith, 2013), the consequences of mishandled or over-exploited resources best-illuminate the interplay between the social, environmental, and economic sustainability of a destination, as “when this happens, sustainable development is severely threatened: economic wellbeing declines, environmental conditions worsen, social injustice grows, and tourist satisfaction drops” (Briassoulis, 2002, p.1065). Given the importance and inherent difficulty of balancing the social, environmental, and economic impact of tourism development, and the convergence of both private and publicly held wealth required to establish tourism destinations, it is crucial for tourism development to be considered legitimate in order to breed sustainability (Sofield and Li, 1998).

### ***Legitimacy***

Illegitimacy in tourism developments is often wrought despite the anticipated positive economic impact on local communities, where, the costs can be environmental, social, and cultural or even, counter-intuitively, financial (Nunkoo and Smith, 2013). As destinations flourish and grow, local community concerns surrounding the cost-of-living, seasonal employment, environmental damage, road traffic, and the dilution of local culture and customs can impact upon the legitimacy of tourism development (Cisneros-Martínez *et al.*, 2018; Bhati and Pearce, 2017; Dyer *et al.*, 2007). True legitimacy in tourism development remains a social process where legitimate, sustainable tourism development is beholden to a range of factors, covering each of the environmental, economic and social sustainability characteristics from the perspective of multiple stakeholders - where policy makers, conservation specialists, local communities, and private businesses must interact and reach common ground in order to ensure the success of a destination (Boley *et al.*, 2017; Kristjánsdóttir *et al.*, 2018). Determining legitimacy is therefore best understood as a process, which lends itself especially well to longitudinal, or historical, analysis to reveal the drivers, procedures, and outcomes of such interactions.

### ***Historical Work on Tourism***

Recent historical work on tourism has focused on Hilton (Maclean *et al.*, 2017), large multinational hotel development (Quek, 2012), heritage and ancestral tourism (Murdy *et al.*, 2018), and ecotourism development (Jones and Spadafora, 2017). Nevertheless, historical analyses in hospitality and tourism remain relatively few (Heslinga *et al.*, 2018). Indeed, while academic attention has focused on investigating issues surrounding destination, service, and site sustainability from a multiple-stakeholder perspective (Boley *et al.*, 2017), this typically centres on exploring the current manifestation of sustainable practices and initiatives (Jones *et al.*, 2016; Liu, 2003). Therefore, in complementing this contemporaneous focus within the field, we turn to *history* to investigate the antecedent factors that underpin sustainable hospitality and tourism to gain a more holistic overview of the issues surrounding sustainable development at large (Foster *et al.*, 2017). Further, while sustainability has been investigated in developing and developed contexts, few studies comparatively explore the path to sustainability exhibited in each (Liu, 2003). This paper thus serves as nascent recognition that the historical-turn throughout the broader business and management literature has yet to be fully investigated in the field of hospitality and tourism (Mura and Sharif, 2017). In doing so, two historical cases are analysed using the 5Cs of historical theory as a conceptual lens: context, change over time, contingency, causality, complexity (Andrews and Burke, 2007), to assess different approaches to sustainability in tourism and hospitality development in each context.

### **Study Description and Methodology:**

Our analysis comprises two comparative case studies of early tourism developments: Aviemore (Scottish Highlands) and Costa Rican ecotourism. At first glance these may appear an incongruous pair of cases to analyse, with different time periods and geographical, cultural, and economic characteristics. However, Eisendardt (1991, p.620) argues: “Different cases often emphasize complementary aspects of a phenomenon. By piecing together the individual patterns, the researcher can draw a more complete theoretical picture”. In this historical examination several complementary insights are revealed that illustrate the challenges and requirements of legitimising tourism and sustainability, fulfilling the three criteria of economic, environmental/ecological, and social sustainability set by Littig and Griessler (2005). Both represent early attempts at stimulating tourism in previously underdeveloped areas. They are clear examples of the importance of understanding how



individual actors influence the development of tourism, considerations of periodisation, and the importance of context in the interplay between different forces in disparate geographical locations. By considering the evolution of both cases over time, we reveal the role of social and political networks in the early stages of legitimising tourism and notions of sustainability, and through careful historical analysis of developing and developed country approaches to hospitality and tourism development, we explore how this impacts upon notions of sustainability and CSR. Both cases are longitudinal in nature, covering periods of around thirty years each.

Similar to the work on Hilton conducted by Maclean *et al.* (2017), we use private and public archive collections from business and government agencies in Scotland and the UK, newspaper reports, and oral history interviews from the Harvard Business School's 'Creating Emerging Markets Oral History Collection' in the Baker Library to capture the development activities of both entrepreneurs and government agencies, and the wider industry impacts of the development of Aviemore and Costa Rica. The archival documentary material investigated were a series of correspondence, communications, discussions, and policy documentation between the different levels of the UK government, individual companies, and the entrepreneur Hugh Fraser concerning the development of the Aviemore tourist facility in Scotland. The oral history testimonies concerning the development of ecotourism in Costa Rica comprised a series of interviews conducted with tour operators detailing their experiences of developing businesses in an environmentally sensitive and sustainable way, forming part of Harvard Business School's Creating Emerging Markets initiative that seeks to collect oral testimonies of entrepreneurs in developing economies for research purposes. In both, we employ Andrews and Burke's (2007) 'five Cs' of historical theory to analyse the cases: context, change over time, causality, complexity, and contingency. We reveal the motivations behind and importance of social connections and challenges of legitimising tourism and hospitality in a sustainable fashion. Andrews and Burke's (2007) five Cs have recently been identified as having the potential to offer greater transparency in historical methods to business and management scholars, alongside being a methodological tool to frame historical analyses (Perchard *et al.*, 2017). By using a historical approach, we consider the longitudinal development of both cases and how different actors at different levels (local/micro, regional/meso, and national/macro) interact to establish sustainable tourism as a legitimate undertaking.

To this end, historical approaches in business and management journals have become increasingly common, with calls made for greater interaction between historians and business scholars (Perchard *et al*, 2017; Wadhvani and Jones, 2014). This has underpinned recent special issues in leading business and management journals dedicated to historical methodologies and empirical analyses, focused on the contemporary value of historical research (**Table 1**).

**[Table 1 Here]**

These special issues are recognition of the value of historical approaches to understanding contemporary business issues, as well as the value of investigating archives as a data source in-and-of themselves. Historical work allows for the testing of theory in history, as well as the development of history in theory, recognising the ‘dual integrity’ of both historical and contemporary approaches to understanding organisational issues, creating a ‘pluralistic understanding’ of methodologies and value across both (Maclean *et al.*, 2016; Perchard *et al*, 2017).

Both cases concern the early stages of tourism development, where the principal sustainability focus is economic, rather than environmental. In Aviemore, the intention was to harness the potential of tourism in order to develop the rural Highland landscape of Scotland. Pushed by government and fronted by a successful entrepreneur, the Aviemore development was intended to demonstrate how tourism could attract not only inbound tourists, but also businesses to further develop the Highland economy. It was principally pursued by government with this in mind and with little heed paid to understanding sustainability or CSR in anything other than economic terms. The Costa Rican case study is similar, but development emerged from the bottom-up with entrepreneurs using ecological sustainability as a competitive advantage in launching their operations. From this sprung growing government recognition of the potential for ecotourism in the area, often lobbied for by entrepreneurial tour operators themselves. In both cases the importance of social and political connections is clear in helping legitimize tourism as a workable industry in areas otherwise unfamiliar with the requirements of establishing, growing, and marketing sustainable notions of tourism development.

**Case 1: Aviemore, Scottish Highlands (UK)**

Recent research on tourism in the Scottish Highlands focuses on the role of heritage and history in attracting tourists (Murdy *et al.*, 2018). Consistent with this is recognition of pull-factors (e.g., nature and facilities) in developing tourism and hospitality (Chen and Chen, 2015). However, tourism in the Scottish Highlands was historically based on selling the idea of a natural area unspoilt by human occupation to create sustainable economic activity (Perchard and MacKenzie, 2013). However, this was not always the case – until the mid-twentieth century the region was largely the domain of the upper-classes, with little concern for long-term sustainable economic growth (Durie, 2003). This changed with the creation of the Aviemore development, which combined a winter sports facility with wider infrastructural improvements to encourage year-round tourism, including accommodation, road development and recreational amenities, funded by the UK government. The Aviemore development was created and backed by governmental money and expertise, but portrayed as a private initiative to legitimise it as a sustainable economic proposition. The government was keen to repurpose the Highlands as an attractive area for industries to relocate of their own accord and sought to use tourism and hospitality as the foundation for sustainable economic development. To do this, various government agencies and private enterprises worked together in the background behind a single high-profile entrepreneur to make Aviemore a viable and attractive alternative to continental European ski resorts, thus improving the tourist and hospitality revenue in the area, providing both employment and self-sufficient growth.

From 1938-1958, the tourism industry's earnings in Scotland doubled to around £50m (Harvie, 1998), and from 1950-1959 inbound tourist numbers increased from 2.7m to over 5m. Notably, of the 5m visitors to the country, over 3.5m came from other parts of Great Britain and less than 1m were from abroad (STB, 1961). The industry's growth was directly linked with increasing prosperity and leisure in the UK more generally (Peden, 2005). Nonetheless, UK tourism during the 1960s was still regarded by some as the 'soft option' for solving economic problems with the belief that it was a seasonal pursuit incapable of providing sustainable, stable, year-round, full-time employment on a large scale (Grassie, 1983).

Aviemore was designed to change this perception, but most Highlands hotels were limited in size and fully booked in peak season with domestic visitors. Thus, overseas tourists visiting Scotland during this period were largely confined to the south of the country in

Turnberry, Gleneagles, and Edinburgh (STB, 1961). For tourism to play any substantive role in the revival of the Highlands would necessitate an increase and improvement in hotel accommodation in the area (O'Dell and Walton, 1963). In 1959, overseas expenditure in Scotland was £14.4m (£287.9m in 2018 prices), with around half from the dollar area. The Scottish Office believed this could be increased with a higher rate of capital investment in the industry by government (McCabe, 1961). The explosion in visitors to Britain after the Second World War helped the industry highlight its potential to create sustainable employment and wealth (McCrone *et al.*, 1995) in an area historically blessed with neither. The idea was that if mass tourism could be harnessed and brought to the Highlands then economic development could be achieved with very little public money spent, other than on facilities.

High-level political discussions took place on how to do this. In 1958 the UK Government Cabinet agreed to explore the possibility of appointing a 'prominent figure in Scottish public life' to promote Highland expansion through the development of tourist possibilities in the area (Cabinet, 1958). Following the meeting, the Scottish Secretary John Maclay discussed with Prime Minister Harold Macmillan what kind of person would be suitable for the project. Macmillan prompted Maclay to 'go for a man' who could catalyse public support for sustainable development in the Highlands (Macmillan, 1959). Maclay had already identified someone – Hugh Fraser – Chairman of 'House of Fraser', owner of Harrods in London, former Chairman and Honorary Treasurer of the Automobile Association, member of the Scottish Tourist Board, Treasurer of the Conservative party in Scotland, and a high-profile businessman (Pottinger, 1971). The idea was to move the appeal of the Highlands from grouse moors and shooting parties to a wider, more sustainable (and profitable) audience. Macmillan believed that tourism should play a wider role in developing the Highlands and that building "simple but comfortable hotels for this class of people" would help achieve this (Macmillan, 1959).

Hugh Fraser was a high-profile choice with impeccable credentials and experience of the tourism industry as a member of the Scottish Tourist Board and hotelier (Macmillan, 1959). Fraser had previously rebuffed the Scottish Tourist Board's suggestion as he was "appalled at...being made responsible for a series of Highland flings" (Pottinger, 1971). However, following pressure exerted by the Earl of Roseberry, the then chairman of the Scottish Tourist Board, Fraser eventually agreed to the proposition of heading a committee to promote the tourism in the Highland area (Roseberry, 1959). Utilising Fraser's expertise

satisfied the desire of the government not to be seen as imposing anything on the area and for Fraser to be portrayed as the lead, a point stressed time-and-again in discussions between officials and ministers (McCallum, 1962).

Fraser created the Highland Tourist Development Company in October 1959 with backing from five Scottish banks: The Royal Bank of Scotland, Bank of Scotland, The British Linen Bank, National Commercial Bank of Scotland, and Clydesdale & North of Scotland Bank – appointing himself chairman (Fraser, 1964). The Highland town of Aviemore, with its strong transport links and tourist traffic enjoyed by the surrounding region, led Fraser to conclude it was the most suitable location for this project. Fraser formed another company Highland Tourist (Cairngorm Development) Ltd. to administer the project in 1964. The new company retained the same directors as the old company, but changed its focus from Highland-wide development to the Aviemore area only (HT, 1964). Fraser’s plan was for Aviemore to contain up to ten hotels, an ‘amenity complex’ housing a heated swimming pool, skating and curling rinks, an all-purpose hall for use as a cinema or conference centre, shopping facilities, and a golf driving range (Fraser, 1964). By the time of Fraser’s announcement, Scottish & Newcastle Breweries and United Caledonian Breweries had committed to the project, whilst talks continued with British Transport Hotels, Sheraton and Hilton (Pottinger, 1963a). There was a belief that the best way to pursue the project was “to attract one of the largest organisations such as Hilton” to develop legitimacy of the idea and build sustainability (Pottinger, 1963b).

Fraser’s announcement received a positive reaction on most sides. In Scotland, newspapers described it as a ‘bold plan’ (*Glasgow Herald*, 10/06/1964); at the UK level it was described as ‘ambitious’ (*The Guardian*, 10/06/1964), providing “winter sports on a scale not previously known in Britain” (*The Daily Telegraph*, 10/06/1964). The *Glasgow Herald* newspaper was particularly supportive of the venture, describing it as the “greatest tourist advance since Victoria and Albert fell in love with Balmoral” (*Glasgow Herald*, 10/06/1964). No mention was made of the government’s guiding hand in creating and funding the project, with Fraser and his consortium portrayed as the instigators and main administrators. However, an objection was received from existing hoteliers in the area, concerned that their businesses could be adversely affected by the new developments. An organisation of hoteliers wrote to the Secretary of State with their concerns:

“It is not only unfair but most alarming, that a concern such as this should step in to reap a crop that was planted by local sweat and money. Hoteliers are not the only people who would suffer, but the very livelihood of entire villages is at stake” (GSHA, 1963)

Where the hoteliers viewed the Aviemore project as a threat to their existence, Fraser felt that the industry could be further enhanced by a new development. Construction of the centre did not go entirely without hitch with problems relating to sewage, payment, housing, and design arising (Gillard and Tomkinson, 1980). On a more successful note, the construction phase employed an average of 200 men (*The Scotsman*, 30/12/1965), rising to 400 at its peak, with almost the entirety sourced in Scotland (HT, 1964). The new Aviemore Centre opened in 1966, although Fraser died before the completion of the project. The centre’s opening was warmly welcomed in the press. However, this sentiment was short-lived as questions were soon asked about its appropriateness to the area and the government’s role in developing it. A former civil servant states:

“A lot of nonsense has been talked about Aviemore. It was carried out as a private, commercial undertaking, not as a government enterprise. The State’s contribution was a grant under the Local Employment Act...available to anyone who satisfied the statutory conditions, and some expenditure on basic services which again would have been provided for any large scale development. The Government naturally hoped that Aviemore would succeed, both for the facilities it offered and as an example to existing hoteliers to modernise their own establishments, but that was the extent of the official involvement” (Pottinger, 1979)

When completed, the plan for the all-year, all-weather provision for holidaymakers of different sporting interests was realised in the centre’s opening. In year-one, 650,000 tourists visited, it won the British Travel Association annual award, increased the number of chalet beds to 290, and international visitors accounted for 4% of the total. In 1967 plans to expand to 1000 residential beds emerged (Fraser, 1968), and a tenfold increase in jobs from 50 to 500 occurred (Civil Service, 1968); the vision of a sustainable tourism and hospitality industry in the Scottish Highlands was becoming attainable.

Local landowners and hoteliers remained unhappy at the actions of the government and Hugh Fraser in their operations in Aviemore, the construction of the site in concrete (a hitherto foreign material in Highland buildings), and on such a grand scale. Nevertheless, environmental concerns were outweighed by the economic benefit and prosperity the development brought to the area, but have remained latent throughout the centre's history, regularly coming to the fore. With Aviemore's success, Highland tourism is now one of the most important industries in the Scottish economy and Aviemore is a holiday destination for winter sports enthusiasts from within and beyond Scotland, as well as an international conference venue (Murdy *et al.*, 2018).

## **Case 2: Costa Rican ecotourism**

Tourism research on Costa Rica typically focuses on the state's role in the creation of National Parks (Honey, 2008). However, recent work stresses the co-creation of sustainable models of tourism and hospitality development by entrepreneurs and NGOs working *with* the state in the creation of the Costa Rican National Parks (Jones and Spadafora, 2017). This was part of a longer process of development born from the interplay between ecologically-committed entrepreneurs, NGOs, and the national government over a period of 30 years to establish environmentally sustainable businesses as a pillar of the Costa Rican economy.

In 1931, the National Tourism Council was established by the Costa Rican government to encourage and develop the industry. This was renamed in 1955 to the "Costa Rican Tourism Institute" (ICT). ICT "*was explicitly permitted to declare and protect national parks*" (Jones and Spadafora, 2017, p.150). However, the focus on tourism was soon replaced by an overt concentration on logging, agriculture, and overdevelopment covering the period 1940-1980 resulting in the loss of 2.5 million hectares of forest (Gamez and Obando, 2004), wreaking environmental havoc on what was (and remains) an extremely sensitive biodiverse environment. Commensurate with this was the ongoing economic crisis that emerged as a result of the Central American Crisis, where the USA and Soviet Union vied for influence in the region resulting in serious economic disruption, wars, and destruction of land and property. Despite the ecological damage caused during this period, Costa Rica became increasingly interesting to scientists due to its biodiversity, which in turn drove the growth of conservation efforts (Evans, 1999).

The efforts of these scientists, aligned to the previously established National Park system in 1970, and numerous private reserves in the country, presaged the ecotourism boom through the provision of accommodation (usually basic in nature) within protected areas to create what became known as ‘science tourism’ (Blake and Becher, 1986). One of the many small tour operators in Costa Rica, Bary Roberts Strachan, said:

“As it turned out, in the later years, we realized that there were a lot of people who were coming down to do studies, like from *National Geographic* or people like that...and some adventurous people, who would come down to do rafting or things of that nature, which was what we started with. So, I had friends that were actively involved in conservation and the rest. In fact two of them, Alvaro Ugalde and Mario Boza, were cofounders with Daniel Oduber of the national park system in 1972” (Spadafora, 2014d)

“It got a reputation of being a natural destination because the national park system got started early—in the ‘70s, it got started in the ’70s, Álvaro Ugalde. There’s another one, a friend of mine” (Spadafora, 2014b)

The scientific work carried out drove what was to eventually become *ecotourism* in Costa Rica through the preservation of natural habitats and the importance of appropriate husbandry of the land. Jones and Spadafora (2016) argue that “Scientists not only catalogued Costa Rica’s biodiversity, promoted conservation, and protected and operated important private reserves, but also helped prefigure the idea of ecotourism”. The extensive biodiversity research conducted during the 1970’s, combined with the efforts of entrepreneurs in developing resorts, clubs, and parks (Honey, 2008) helped stimulate the conditions necessary for the further development of sustainable tourism. This manifested in the development of an association dedicated to protecting the Costa Rican environment.

“There was a large organization formed in San José called ASCONA. ASCONA was the Association for the Conservation of Nature, I believe – ‘Asociación para la Conservación de la Naturaleza’. It was funded by USAID. And it became very influential all over the country. They had a chapter in San Isidro and I became a member of the board of directors, and I met a lot of other people, who were involved



with ASCONA, other environmentalists in Costa Rica, and we all exchanged ideas. Most of us were interested in tourism at some level” (Spadafora, 2014b)

By the late 1970s there was growing recognition of the value of environmentally sustainable businesses, particularly from entrepreneurs entering Costa Rica with a view to developing ecologically-sensitive tourism ventures. Relationships between entrepreneurs and eco-tour operators flourished in some cases, bearing more fruit and burgeoning relations between ecologically-aware entrepreneurs and policymakers.

“I came back to Costa Rica and started to look for people and to try to do things that would allow me to have some kind of positive impact in how tourism was being taken care of...I did have good relationships—my stepbrother was the minister of planning. He worked with President Óscar Arias—he organized a forum called Costa Rica in the Year 2000. They invited a whole bunch of people to come there...[including] Maurice Strong who was for thirty-five years the undersecretary of the United Nations for Environmental Affairs” (Spadafora, 2014d)

These relations grew as environmental sustainability became increasingly visible as both a desirable ecological aim and a competitive advantage in a burgeoning global tourism market, with policymakers moving beyond understanding sustainability in purely economic terms toward considering the ecological underpinnings of sustainable development. Relationships with government were not always positive, with some entrepreneurs recalling how they coalesced to fight for greater policy support (Spadafora, 2014c). Nonetheless, following the economic crisis of the mid-1980s, the Costa Rican government shifted its focus back to tourism as a way of bolstering its economy. With this came legislation in 1985 to incentivise large-scale tourism development and investment. However, there was still no overarching governmental plan for tourism, but rather an implicit recognition that it should be developed. Consequently it was individual entrepreneurs (mainly ex-patriates) setting-up businesses with a strong sustainable focus and sense of social responsibility underpinning their activities that drove the growth and development of sustainability and CSR:

“There was, to my knowledge, back then [late 1980s], no master plan for tourism. It evolved spontaneously, and most of it came from the entrepreneurial spirits of expats, and nationals, who had one thing in common: they loved the country, and they loved

the idea that they could host people to see the response, because from the get-go, it has been more and more of the same experience with my fellow hoteliers, which is, we attract a market niche that supports what we want to do, which is conserve the natural beauty of the country” (Spadafora, 2014a)

In 1987, the Costa Rican president Oscar Arias Sanchez won the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts in ending the Central American Crisis. By 1992, the US Adventure Travel Society described Costa Rica as the “number one tourist destination in the world” (Honey, 2008, p.160). The Costa Rican government by this point were taking ecotourism and the commensurate focus on environmental sustainability seriously, often pushed from below by entrepreneurs:

“So in 1994, the new president, José Maria Figueres, the son of Pepe Figueres, asked one of my very best friends and brothers, Carlos Roesch, to be his minister of tourism. He asked me if I would come in as vice president of the ICT, in order to inject some sustainability to it. And he gave an order the very first day in office; he gave a directive to all his ministers that every single ministry had to have a sustainability concept, incorporated into anything they did” (Spadafora, 2014d)

“And when Mr. Méndez Mata [Costa Rican government minister] came here, because his daughter was married at the hotel, and said, “What is this drink about?” well, I gave the history. He said, “Well, how about if I pave the road, while I am the minister, to the cul-de-sac of the national park?” (Spadafora, 2014a)

In 1997 the ICT introduced its Certificate for Sustainable Tourism (CST) program aimed at formalising environmental sustainability in the sector, signalling a divergence from understanding sustainability in purely economic terms towards recognition of environmental aspects. With small tour operators sustaining the maintenance of National Parks, in the 1990s, the Costa Rican government declared environmental sustainability a core strategy, ratifying new forestry laws and establishing further National Park regions (Evans, 1999).

By 2002, the United Nations ‘International Year of Ecotourism’, Costa Rica transformed itself into an ecotourism hub renowned for its brand as a natural paradise (Jones and Spadafora, 2017). It has been successful in promoting the image of a country that offers natural attractions and environmentally sensitive travel; possessing 5% of all global

biodiversity despite only accounting for 0.035% of the world's surface (Honey, 2008), with 25% of the country's landmass protected (Almeyda *et al.*, 2010a). Recently, it has become a leader in sustainable tourism business certification, known for its progressive environmental policies (Stem *et al.*, 2003), and is considered "a model for nations seeking to manage tourism responsibly" (Almeyda *et al.*, 2010b, p.805).

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

The historical cases reveal different conceptualisations of sustainability – in both, the governmental view of sustainability was primarily economic; principally concerned with how tourism could offer economic development and employment opportunities, with environmental concerns either secondary (Costa Rica) or ignored altogether (Aviemore). In Costa Rica, entrepreneurship served as the driver of ecotourism and the ecological aspects of the development. For Aviemore, the government's economic sustainability desire drove the development. In both, the 5Cs – context, change over time, contingency, causality, complexity – are clear.

The context for both cases is important. This can be explained by periodisation and economic development maturity. Costa Rica, at the time, was an underdeveloped economy where tour operators sought competitive advantage and identified, on the back of localised scientific research, the country's plentiful biodiversity as an attraction for inbound tourists. In Aviemore, the underdeveloped 'Highland' economy was considered an attraction due to the largely unspoilt scenery. In both, the attraction of tourists to the local environment drew out the potential for economic activity to sustain and develop hospitality enterprises. However, it was the origins of both which saw them take different paths towards developing their offerings.

The change over time in both cases demonstrates how sustainable tourism developed. During the 1960s, UK policymakers considered tourism a seasonally-fluctuating industry that could be relied upon only to assist with "consolidation in some of the main [population] centres and give a supplementary income to the dispersed population engaged in primary and service industry" (HMSO, 1966). Here, understanding of sustainability was purely economic – with no discussion of environmental sustainability in the Aviemore development, save for complaints at the use construction materials. CSR was similarly absent. In part, this can be attributed to the top-down approach by the government to embedding tourism in the

Highlands and Scotland as a serious industry capable of sustaining inhabitants in an otherwise sparsely-populated area. The policymakers who conceived of the idea had little-to-no interest in environmental sustainability, or ensuring companies behaved appropriately – their focus was halting population decline, providing jobs for locals, and economic development. Their approach centred on using a high-profile entrepreneur to legitimise the industry and create economic sustainability. With Costa Rica, the focus on environmental sustainability came from the entrepreneurs – the government’s focus was again economic sustainability, trying to drive tourism as a growth sector. There was recognition of the benefits of environmental sustainability through the creation of National Parks and belated certification, but this was a result of the efforts of environmentally-conscious scientists in the first instance, then ecologically-sensitive tour operators demonstrating the economic value to be derived from environmental sustainability.

In both cases, contingency in the form of the principal actors, complexity in terms of the levels of engagement between different actors and contexts, and causality in terms of how change was affected are apparent in illustrating the initial focus on economic, rather than environmental or socio-cultural sustainability. Across both, it is clear that economic sustainability emerges as an antecedent of future sustainability encompassing broader concerns. The historical analysis conducted using the 5Cs shows how different antecedents result in cohesive sustainable tourism development.

**[Figure 1 Here]**

**Figure 1** represents the process of establishing tourism sustainability, identifying key antecedents cognizant of the ‘five Cs’: context, change over time, causality, complexity, and contingency (Andrews and Burke, 2007) in the development of sustainability in tourism. Here, we propose that a combination of antecedents - economic viability, social and political networks, private-sector support - are necessary but individually insufficient in developing and establishing sustainable tourism and hospitality initiatives. This is evidenced by the two cases analysed using historical approaches, which reveal the importance of these antecedents. With regards to contemporary hospitality and tourism development, this study demonstrates the importance of the private-sector in underpinning sustainability initiatives. We suggest tourism planners embrace the convergence of public- and private-sector required to stimulate sustainable development. While private-sector involvement has previously been met with cynicism (Jones *et al.*, 2016), our findings suggest this is crucial in ensuring the economic

viability of tourism development projects. With regards to theoretical implications, this study demonstrates the similarity inherent within the antecedent factors underpinning different notions of sustainable tourism development through a historical lens. In doing so, we consider the antecedents of sustainable tourism development within a hospitality and tourism context in a manner consistent with the historical turn in business and management more generally (Foster et al., 2017), illustrating the value of such analysis.

The deployment of elite social networks was an important feature of the development of both Aviemore and ecotourism in Costa Rica. With Aviemore, networks were pursued from the top-down with government ministers using their connections to high-profile Scottish entrepreneurs to front their development aspirations. In Costa Rica, it was a bottom-up approach, with many small tour operators engaging with high-level government officials, lobbying for increased support for ecological sustainability in business. In both, the legitimisation of tourism, and sustainability more generally, came from the private-sector despite significant differences between the two case studies in terms of context, geography, and periodisation. This suggests that private-sector led efforts are critical to establishing sustainable tourism initiatives, particularly when little-to-no experience of tourism is present in an area. However, this must converge with social and political networks to attain legitimacy. Further, these cases suggest that notions of sustainability change over time, and legitimizing them requires private and public-sector co-operation.

In practical terms, the findings presented demonstrate how historical methods can provide insight into contemporary tourism and hospitality issues. Historical archives represent significant new sources of data and information for tourism scholars and educators alike. The cases studied are rich in source material and ‘real life’ examples of sustainable tourism initiatives. The verifiability of the source material is presented in the transparency of the references, allowing researchers to access the archives to consider the stories for themselves. In policy terms, the importance of local businesses in establishing sustainable tourism initiatives is clear – despite the notable differences at first glance in both cases, they demonstrate how both top-down (government-led) and bottom-up (entrepreneur-led) approaches to establishing tourism in new areas requires co-ordination of support and engagement across multiple levels in order to succeed. Further, the identification of the economic antecedents of sustainable tourism is a key learning point for researchers and policy-makers alike – without private-sector backing, economic viability, and the support of

key social and political actors, the establishment and development of sustainable tourism projects remain challenging.

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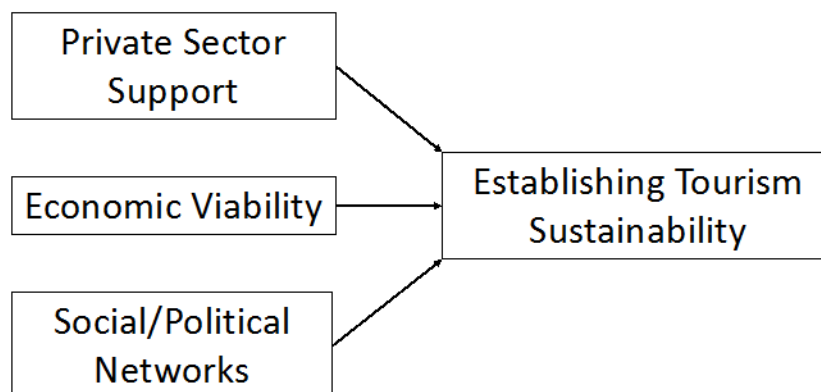
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## Tables and Figures

**Table 1:** Historical Analyses in Business and Management

<b>Journal</b>	<b>Special Issue Topic</b>	<b>Year</b>
<i>Academy of Management Review</i>	Special Issue: History	2016
<i>Journal of Business Ethics</i>	Special Issue on Historic Corporate Responsibility	2017
<i>Journal of Management Studies</i>	Business History	2010
<i>Management Learning</i>	Celebrating 50 years of Management Learning: Historical reflections at the intersection of the past and future	2018
<i>Organization Studies</i>	Uses of the Past: History and Memory in Organizations and Organizing	2015
<i>Strategic Entrepreneurship</i>	Historical Approaches To Entrepreneurship Research: Investigating Context, Time, and Change in Entrepreneurial Processes	2018
<i>Strategic Management Journal</i>	History and Strategy Research: Opening Up the Black Box	2018

### Antecedents



**Figure 1:** Foundations of Sustainable Tourism