

This is the author's accepted manuscript of an article that was published in  
Tourism Management vol 47

Doi: 10.1016/j.tourman.2014.09.019

## Politics and sustainable tourism: The case of Cyprus

Farmaki A, Altinay L, Botterill D, Hilke S

### Highlights

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Sustainable tourism implementation in complex political contexts is problematic.

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Strong influence of politics on sustainable tourism development and implementation.

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External axes of power shape the political milieu of tourism.

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Interface between the political system and social environment is influential.

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Sustainability discourse requires a sophisticated approach regarding 'power'.

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### Abstract

Cyprus' volatile political environment lends an interesting case for enhancing knowledge on the politics of tourism. The importance of tourism for the island's economy makes the study of the political influences on the new-found goal of sustainable tourism development imperative. This paper investigates the political factors influencing sustainable tourism implementation in Cyprus. Analysis is informed by Lukes' conceptualisation of power relations. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with key

stakeholders, the findings suggest that sustainable tourism implementation continues to be problematic, given Cyprus' complex political context, which is highly susceptible to external axes of power. The strong influence of the socio-cultural environment on the politics driving sustainable tourism inhibits its effective implementation. This paper proposes a theoretical framework and a methodology for studying the politics of sustainable tourism development.

## Keywords

- Politics;
- Power;
- Sustainable tourism;
- Planning;
- Development;
- Cyprus

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## 1. Introduction

There are few messier political environments worldwide from which to advance knowledge on the politics of tourism than Cyprus. Centuries of contested national identity and occupations by political dynasties and colonial powers, form a staggeringly complex political milieu on the island. Cyprus is a full member of the European Union (EU) but in practice only the south of the island, with its strong economic and cultural ties to Greece, is active within the EU. Since 1974, the island has been divided by a UN buffer zone. The north of the island forms the Turkish Cypriot State, recognised only by Turkey and highly dependent on Ankara. Recent economic activity in southern Cyprus has been significantly bolstered by capital investments from Russia, but in 2012 Cyprus' economy was badly hit by its extensive exposure to the recession-hit economy of Greece, forcing the country to seek emergency help from international lenders. Additionally, the island's proximity to the Middle East makes it a vital NATO base from which to monitor developments in the region. Thus, the political influences felt on this island are distilled from several axes of power including the multi-national NATO Western alliance, supra-national states in the form of the EU and the Russian Federation and the neighbouring nation states of Greece and Turkey. Given this political context, it is hardly surprising that tourism on the

island has also passed through turbulent times. In this volatile economic and political environment, the spectre of the stable influence of sustainable development increased in credence on both sides of the island, albeit for quite different reasons. The specific conditions we refer to are laid out below in a rationale for the focus of this article on the politics of the implementation of sustainable tourism on Cyprus.

As southern Cyprus relied on mass tourism for its recovery, it experienced steady growth with reaching 2,700,000 arrivals in 2001. In the subsequent decade, fluctuating and steadily declining tourist arrivals and revenues have marked the performance of the industry, with numbers dropping below 2.0 million in 2009 ([Country Profiler, 2011](#)). However, in 2011 the first significant increase since 2011 occurred (9.2% in comparison to 2010), sparking optimism in the industry. This positive trend continued in 2012 with an increase of 3%, despite the economic crisis and political uncertainty ([CYSTAT, 2013](#)).

On the other hand, northern Cyprus had to cope with the consequences of being a non-recognised state and was forced into acute financial and political dependency on Turkey ([Alipour & Kilic, 2005](#)). This affected not only the promotion of northern Cyprus, but also its attractiveness for foreign investment and employment ([Altinay et al., 2002](#) and [Altinay and Bowen, 2006](#)). Declining tourist arrivals, continuing economic decline and a shrinking market were the damaging consequences ([Alipour & Kilic, 2005](#)). Despite these challenging circumstances, the tourist industry in northern Cyprus succeeded in developing and is today one of its major economic engines. In 2012, the tourism industry reached a net income of \$459.4 million, created 12,053 jobs and 1,166,186 tourist arrivals were registered. In comparison to 2003, net income achieved an increase of 157% from \$178.8 million to \$459.4 million ([TCRN Ministry of Tourism, Environment and Culture, 2012](#)). Although tourism development has not been as successful as in southern Cyprus in terms of volume, it is argued that tourism development in northern Cyprus holds enormous potential as the area remains one of the few unspoiled corners in the Mediterranean ([Altinay et al., 2002](#) and [Yasarata et al., 2010](#)).

The underlying circumstances of tourism development on both sides of the island have resulted in a shared imperative to progress sustainable tourism, shaped however by very different sets of issues in each side of the island. In southern Cyprus, the pursuit of sustainable tourism has entered official government policy as a response to market volatility, increasing

environmental consciousness in consumer markets and previously damaging development regimes. The story in northern Cyprus is markedly different, as the drive for sustainable tourism emerges from private sector players seeking to capitalise on perceived environmental quality gains, unintended consequences of its political isolation. Thus, in both parts of the island there are equally compelling, but quite different, justifications for the implementation of sustainable tourism. The extent of success or failure in implementing sustainable tourism on the island of Cyprus is, as yet, unreported in the literature.

Reports of research into the political factors influencing the development and implementation of sustainable tourism are rare, an exception being [Yasarata et al. \(2010\)](#) who argue that an important challenge to the research community in seeking to understand the trajectory of sustainable development is to document the political ideologies and power structures of destinations. As a response to this challenge and the general goal of promoting rigorous, context specific analysis of the politics of tourism, this article aims to make two distinct contributions to the understanding of the politics of tourism. First, in the complex political context of Cyprus we will show how the implementation of sustainable tourism continues to be highly problematic. In our analysis we draw on [Lukes' \(2005\)](#) conceptualisation of power relations and exemplify its application to the politics of sustainable tourism. From our study, we propose a general set of mechanisms that act to enable and constrain the implementation of sustainable tourism. These are offered as a theoretical frame for further studies of sustainable tourism in complex political contexts. Second, we will make explicit a methodology for studying the politics of sustainable tourism at the destination level that incorporates key concepts from the extant literature with empirical fieldwork in a novel data analysis framework.

The article begins with a brief overview of tourism development in Cyprus. Two relevant areas of the literature are then reviewed. First, the literature on the role of politics in tourism policymaking is discussed. Second, the inhibiting factors and challenges identified in the literature in relation to sustainable tourism implementation are reported. The methodology adopted in the study is then described, followed by the study findings. In our findings, the particular political challenges inhibiting sustainable tourism development and implementation in Cyprus are exposed by comparing and contrasting the views of informants from northern and southern Cyprus.

## 2. Tourism development in Cyprus

Prior to its independence from Great Britain in 1960, tourism development in Cyprus was minimal and mainly concentrated in the Troodos mountains. Acknowledging the potential benefits of tourism, the newly-founded Cyprus government initiated a tourism development plan by concentrating facilities in the northern coastal towns of Kyrenia and Famagusta. Tourist arrivals grew rapidly and by 1973 the island was accepting approximately 240000 tourists ([Ayres, 2000](#)). However, tensions between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot inhabitants of the island escalated when Turkish troops intervened in response to a military coup that was backed by Greece, leading to the partition of the island in 1974. As a result two administrations developed: the Republic of Cyprus – an internationally recognised state and member of the EU – in the south and the Turkish Cypriot administration in the north, which remains a non-recognised ‘*de facto*’ state, economically and politically highly dependent on Turkey.

### 2.1. Southern Cyprus

From the perspective of the south the 1974 war had a crippling effect on the Cyprus tourism industry, as the majority of tourism development was concentrated in the northern part of the island ([Sharpley, 2003](#)). The need to relocate tourism development to the south of the Green Line became imperative and so investment incentives, targeted economic policies, institutional restructuring and policy reformations were deployed ([Ioannides, 1992](#)). The southern part of Cyprus became a well-known sea and sun destination, accepting by the end of the 1990s more than 2 million tourists annually and almost €1927.7 million in tourism revenue. Attracting tourists mainly from European countries, southern Cyprus' target markets are the UK, Germany, Greece, Sweden and Norway with 80% of all tourists arriving between April and October. In recent years, Russia has become an important new market.

The rapid growth and reliance on mass tourism yielded several negative effects including environmental degradation, unskilled foreign labour, perishing cultural identity and a persistent sea and sun image that are considered counter-productive to product diversification and initiatives to extend out-of-season visitation ([Clerides & Pashourtidou, 2007](#)). By the early 2000s, it was clear that the tourism product of southern Cyprus had reached stagnation and was further being threatened by emerging competition and changing tourist needs. With tourist arrivals fluctuating throughout the last decade, tourism authorities in southern Cyprus highlighted the need to adopt a more sustainable development strategy to

distribute economic benefits to local communities, extend seasonality, minimise environmental pressures on the coastline and preserve traditional culture (CTO, 2010). Following the euro debt crisis and the exposure of the frailty of south Cyprus banks, the need to further boost the economy has been highlighted (BBC, 2013). As a result, economic development focus shifted back onto mass tourism growth and several scholars have questioned the role that sustainable tourism will play in the near future in the attempt of the government to grow its economy through tourism.

## 2.2. Northern Cyprus

Whilst southern Cyprus is struggling to counteract the problems of mass tourism development, northern Cyprus is faced with the practicality of overcoming its political isolation and forging a distinct Cypriot destination offering. With a small internal market and an inability to attract foreign investment due to the economic and political isolation (Ioannides & Apostolopoulos, 1999), tourism development in northern Cyprus has been less intensive. Table 1 outlines the comparison between Southern and Northern Tourism Industries.

Table 1.

Tourism Figures (2012): Comparison between Southern and Northern Cyprus.

	Tourism policy	Intern. Tourist arrivals	Tourism revenue	Accommodation units	Annual occupancy rate
Southern Cyprus	Sustainable development to distribute economic benefits to local communities, extend seasonality, minimise environmental pressures on the coastline and preserve traditional culture	2.4 million	€1927.7 million	824	62.5%
Northern Cyprus	Sustainable tourism development that is economically, environmentally and socially sustainable	257,000	€342.9 million	159	44.1%

Sources: CTO, 2013 and TCRN, 2013.

[Table options](#)

Whilst southern Cyprus attracted approximately 2.4 million tourists in 2012 and an estimated €1927.7 million contribution to the economy, the northern part of the island had barely 257,000 international tourist arrivals (primarily from Britain and Germany), earning US\$459.4 million in tourism revenue. Although tourist demand has doubled since 1995, the tourism industry in

northern Cyprus is faced with severe challenges. Northern Cyprus' airports are only accessible through Turkey, significantly increasing journey times. Consequently, there is heavy reliance on the Turkish market with 904,505 arrivals originating from Turkey. Sustainable Tourism Development is high on the agenda of Northern Cyprus Tourism Industry, tourism master plan advocating that tourism should be developed in an economically, environmentally and socially sustainable way ([Altinay et al., 2002](#)). However, with 23 casinos based in northern Cyprus, gambling has become an important sub-sector of tourism that has the effect of shortening the length of stay, generally considered detrimental to a healthy tourism sector ([Altinay et al., 2002](#)). Other challenges include a shortage of qualified staff, a lack of a distinctive brand (as northern Cyprus is often promoted alongside Turkey), and unplanned development along the coast ([Yasarata et al., 2010](#)). Moreover, the lack of formal institutions and the absence of clear tourism policies give rise to fears that political elites and the close cooperative relations with Turkey are directing tourism development towards an unsustainable pathway ([Altinay & Hussain, 2005](#)).

### 3. Literature review

In the following section the relationship of politics to tourism, and in particular the role of power in tourism politics, is examined.

#### 3.1. The role of politics in tourism policy making

The study of tourism and politics has been championed for around 30 years. [Richter's \(1989\)](#) pioneering research in tourism and political science encouraged scholars in the social sciences to investigate the politics of tourism. [Hall's \(1994\)](#) application of political theory in tourism demonstrated the political dimensions of tourism, and, in the last decade scholarship has increased volume. A review of the literature reveals three distinct categories of research on tourism and politics: a) public policy and planning analyses ([Burns, 2004](#), [Hall and Rusher, 2004](#) and [Krutwaysho and Bramwell, 2010](#); [Pechlaner & Tschurtschenthaler, 2003](#); [Stevenson et al., 2008](#) and [Zhang et al., 2002](#)), b) political economy and development studies ([Bianchi, 2002](#), [Bramwell, 2011](#), [Nelson, 2012](#), [Nunkoo and Smith, 2013](#) and [Williams, 2004](#)) and c) research on political stability and tourism ([Causevic and Lynch, 2013](#), [Hall et al., 2004](#), [Issa and Altinay, 2006](#) and [O'Brien, 2012](#)).

According to [Sofield \(2003\)](#) the relationship between the state, government and politics has been subsumed under economic or sociological

constructions rather than being considered in relation to the political dimension. Yet, the important contribution of tourism to economic development and its hegemonic value implies that tourism is inextricably linked to politics ([Hall, 2010](#) and [Henderson, 2002](#)). Studies linking tourism and politics have foregrounded specific perspectives such as environmental politics ([Backstrand et al., 2010](#), [Bulkeley and Betsill, 2005](#), [Duffy, 2006](#), [Erkus-Ozturk and Eraydin, 2010](#) and [Paterson et al., 2003](#)) and heritage politics ([Dahles, 2002](#), [Harrison and Hitchcock, 2005](#), [Reinfeld, 2003](#), [Rkhter, 2004](#) and [Wang and Bramwell, 2012](#)) providing case studies of the varying contexts in which tourism development occurs. The political intervention of tourism as an agent of change at the global, regional and local scale has also attracted considerable literature ([Burns and Novelli, 2006](#), [Chang and Huang, 2004](#), [Duffy and Moore, 2011](#), [Teo and Li, 2003](#), [Woods, 2011](#) and [Zhu, 2012](#)). Moreover, an expanding area of practical research on tourism politics has offered interesting insights into specific destination contexts ([Altinay and Bowen, 2006](#), [Chheang, 2008](#), [Hazbun, 2008](#), [Henderson, 2008](#), [Kim et al., 2007](#), [McLeod and Airey, 2007](#), [Su and Teo, 2009](#) and [Yasarata et al., 2010](#)).

A recurrent theme in studies of the politics of tourism is the concept of governance, with researchers giving increasing attention to paradigms of power as they investigate relations among tourism actors ([Beritelli and Laesser, 2011](#), [Bianchi, 2003](#), [Bramwell and Lane, 2011](#), [Bramwell and Meyer, 2007](#), [Church and Coles, 2007](#), [Dredge and Pforr, 2008](#), [Hall, 2007](#), [Hall, 2010](#), [Hall, 2011](#), [Healey, 2006](#), [Nyaupane and Timothy, 2010](#), [Menkhaus, 2007](#) and [Ruhanen, 2013](#)). According to [Henderson \(2003, p.98\)](#) “tourism is a highly political phenomenon which extends beyond the sphere of formal government structures and processes, if politics is conceived as being essentially about power relations, and it is thus an underlying and indirect theme in tourism research”. Indeed, tourism politics are argued to be about a struggle of power, rules and authority over decision-making, resource distribution and policymaking ([Sofield, 2003](#)) with various interests at the local, regional and national level attempting to influence the position of tourism in political agendas. Given the multiplicity of actors involved in tourism development and the fragmented nature of the tourism sector, the concept of power in tourism needs to be further explored.

“Power is clearly a key element in understanding how decisions are made and why certain values are excluded from tourism policy ... in the absence of such acknowledgement, much tourism research will continue to be blind to the critical role of argument in the policy



process and maintain its supposedly value-neutral appraisal of tourism policy” ([Hall & Jenkins, 1995](#), p.93).

Thus, the concept of power and stakeholder relations demands particular attention in our study of Cyprus.

### 3.2. Power and stakeholder relations

Numerous researchers have attempted to conceptualise power ([Foucault, 1982](#), [Kaplan, 1964](#), [Lukes, 1974](#), [Lukes, 2005](#) and [Parsons, 1963](#)), yet as [Doorne \(1998\)](#) argues its definition is often anchored in specific environments in which it is contextualised. Researchers have related power to the concepts of authority, influence, manipulation, coercion and force ([Bachrach and Baratz, 1970](#) and [Lukes, 1974](#)). Indeed, the concept of power lies within the notions of domination, submission and subordination of governors and governed ([Key, 1958](#)) in what [Lasswell \(1958\)](#), cited in [Elliot \(1983, p.378\)](#), called a determination of “who gets what, when and how”. [Arendt \(1970\)](#) claimed that power is based on consensus and is a collective capacity. Similarly, [Haugaard \(2002\)](#) stated that power can contribute positively to social order as power is a product of social interaction. The view that power is a relational effect, which is constantly changing, is shared among several researchers ([Beritelli and Laesser, 2011](#), [Cheong and Miller, 2000](#), [Foucault, 1978](#) and [Foucault, 1980](#)). Whilst power has been considered one of the major concepts in social sciences, in tourism it has been selectively investigated ([Cheong and Miller, 2000](#), [Coles and Church, 2007](#), [Hall, 2010](#) and [Sofield, 2003](#)).

Sitting beneath the attempts of tourism researchers to engage with power relations is the contest over the conceptualisation of power ([Hall, 2010](#)). In this debate, the contribution of [Lukes \(2005\)](#) is considered particularly influential. [Hall \(2010\)](#) provides the broad antecedents to the formulation of Lukes' dimensions, or faces, of power in making the case for tourism researchers to consider issues such as; who is controlling the legitimacy of the agenda, what is happening behind decision making processes, the mobilisation of bias and interests, and, however challenging it might seem, to study non-action in decision making. These concerns, captured by [Hall \(2010:203\)](#) in his discussion of the “second face of power”, are important analytical devices that we adopt in this article in order to better understand the situation faced by our respondents.

As [Hall \(2010\)](#) also reminds us, a focus on non-decision making has invoked the Gramscian notion of hegemony that, in turn, proved influential in shaping

Lukes' third dimension of power. The idea that power might shape human processes in an unconscious way to the point that it conceals people's real interest is a central tenet of Lukes' third dimension, "A may exercise power over shape B by getting him to do what he does not want to do, but he also exercises power over him by influencing, shaping or determining his very wants" (Lukes, 2005:27). In our introduction we described the continuing dependency that characterises politics on Cyprus and we will return to the influences of both state and supra-state political entities later in our analysis of sustainable tourism implementation, invoking Lukes' third dimension of power.

Researchers investigated the asymmetry of power between residents and tourists (Butler, 1980 and Shaw and Williams, 2004), power relations at the local and global level (Bianchi, 2002 and Judd and Simpson, 2003) and power within a public sector policy context (Elliot, 1983, Hall, 1994 and Hall, 2000). Overall, two main threads from literature on power and tourism can be drawn: firstly, social network analyses investigating power relations (Beritelli and Laesser, 2011, Nunkoo and Ramkissoon, 2012, Scott et al., 2008, Wang and Fesenmaier, 2007 and Wang and Krakover, 2008) and secondly, research viewing power within a tourism policy domain (Airey and Chong, 2010, Gunn and Var, 2002, Hall, 2008 and Pforr, 2006). Dowding (1996) suggested that discussion on the use of power can be narrowed down to two prevailing concepts: 'power over' and 'power to'. In tourism, power of interest groups 'over' local and regional governments (Mowforth & Munt, 1998) and power 'to' shape aspects of tourist activities (Coleman and Crang, 2002 and Crouch, 2004) has been investigated. Hence, Church & Coles' (2007) definition of power as the interplay of individuals, organisations and agencies influencing or trying to influence the direction of policy reflects the relations among stakeholders.

The notion of sustainable tourism implies that social groups and host communities need to participate in decision-making on a relatively level playing field. Yet, "in tourism planning and policymaking it is inequality rather than equality that is the order of the day" (Hall & Jenkins, 2004, p.77). While governments are presumed to be the most powerful stakeholder, this may not always be the case. The success of sustainable tourism implementation depends greatly on the government's ability to coordinate and balance roles and interests of stakeholder groups and to protect resources through appropriate developmental strategies, yet even governments play many roles: investor, regulator, planner and coordinator, thus opening the possibility of a complex web of over-lapping interests.

As sustainable tourism policies are often made in non-tourism governmental departments, the network of actors involved in its implementation is further expanded. [Richter, Butler and Pearce \(1995\)](#) argues that the scale, issues and number of participants in tourism politics has changed, leading to fiercer power struggles. Tourism is a complex sector by nature, consisting of multiple actors with diverse interests, thus, policymaking and implementation is bound to face challenges. Research has shown that within western democracy power is also exerted on governments by strong industrial associations, lobbies or private sector elites including external investors ([Bramwell and Meyer, 2007](#) and [O'Brien, 2012](#)). Several studies have indicated that failed sustainable tourism implementation derives from the dominance of an economic imperative directing tourism development ([Bianchi, 2004](#), [Bramwell, 2011](#), [Daphnet et al., 2012](#), [Hall, 2011](#), [Logar, 2010](#), [Twining-Ward and Butler, 2002](#) and [Wesley and Pforr, 2010](#)). Other inhibiting factors include political misdirection, volatility and conflict ([Church and Coles, 2007](#), [Novelli et al., 2012](#), [Ruhanen, 2013](#) and [Yasarata et al., 2010](#)).

What the existing literature tells us is that the influence of human relations on political environments, the social context in which policymaking takes place and institutional arrangements pertaining to tourism planning are influential in shaping tourism development. [Sharpley and Knight \(2009, p.242\)](#) argue that “the nature of state involvement and policies for tourism is dependent on both the political economic structures and the prevailing political ideology in the destination state”. [Burns \(2004\)](#) agrees that ideological beliefs directly shape tourism policies. Although [Mowforth and Munt \(2009\)](#) argue that mutually beneficial relationships are essential for effective tourism planning, the development of tourism becomes largely a political practice, with power struggles among public and private sector stakeholders as well as the host community being more evident than ever at the global, national and sub-national levels.

### 3.3. Implementing sustainable tourism

According to [Dredge and Jenkins \(2007\)](#) policies denote the formal positions of governments; hence, planning is related to the political background of a destination. To date, a number of scholars have devoted their attention to the relationship between tourism and politics ([Burns and Novelli, 2007](#), [Church and Coles, 2007](#), [Hall, 1994](#) and [Richter, 1989](#)). However, few studies have examined the political factors surrounding the decision-making processes influencing sustainable tourism implementation. [Coles and](#)

[Church \(2007\)](#) agree that the social and political dimension of sustainable tourism development has been largely ignored by academic researchers. Whilst several authors argued that the problem of sustainable tourism implementation lies in its practical application ([Bianchi, 2004](#), [Daphnet et al., 2012](#), [Dewhurst and Thomas, 2003](#), [Dodds, 2007](#), [Hardy et al., 2002](#) and [Logar, 2010](#)), and stakeholder-related issues have been identified as a barrier ([Bell and Morse, 2004](#), [Dodds, 2007](#), [Hardy and Beeton, 2001](#), [Waligo et al., 2013](#) and [Yasarata et al., 2010](#)), the political dimension involved in the implementation process of sustainable tourism remains an under-researched area.

#### 4. Methodology

We now turn our attention to the second aim of this article - to make explicit a methodology for studying the politics of sustainable tourism at the destination level that incorporates key concepts from the extant literature with empirical fieldwork in a novel, data analysis framework. Out of the literature review, a set of research questions drove the data collection and analysis employed in this study. These were:

- Which stakeholders are responsible for policymaking surrounding tourism development?
- Who is involved in sustainable tourism implementation?
- What type of conflicts exists between stakeholders with regards to decisions pertaining to sustainable tourism development?
- How are these manifested in the implementation phase?

While the literature has opened up important areas of inquiry for our study, it was less helpful in methodological terms. In order to capture the complexity of the politics of tourism on the island of Cyprus and to analyse the current status of sustainable tourism implementation, it was necessary to design a research methodology, incorporating a framework to guide data collection and analysis (see [Fig. 1](#)).

## Tourism Politics

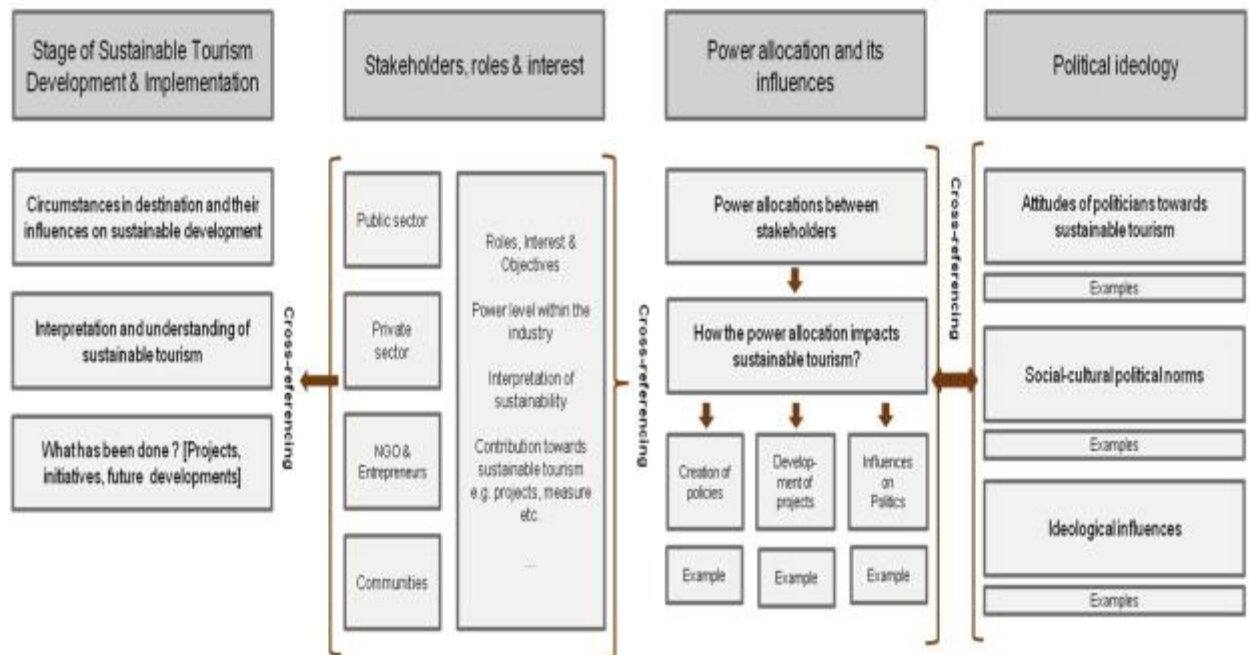


Fig. 1.

Data collection and analysis framework.

Source: Authors.

### Figure options

This framework has been designed based on the review of the literature. The review of the literature revealed that investigating different country context requires an evaluation of the different stages of sustainable tourism development and implementation. One, however, needs to consider the roles and interests of different stakeholders in the sustainable development and implementation process. This is particularly important as power allocation and exertion of power by different stakeholder groups influences the creation of sustainable policies, development of projects as well as the politics of decision making and implementation among the stakeholder groups. In addition, in understanding tourism politics, it is important to consider the political ideology of the country context where politicians could possess different attitudes and mindsets towards sustainable tourism development and implementation; context is embedded within different socio-cultural political norms and ideological influences.

#### 4.1. Data collection

The aim of the study was to gain in-depth understanding on the factors influencing sustainable tourism implementation in relation to politics, thus a qualitative research strategy was adopted. Specifically, exploratory semi-

structured interviews were undertaken with key stakeholders identified by the researchers as being directly and indirectly related to the tourism sectors of both southern and northern Cyprus. Purposive sampling from the stakeholder communities was used, as it is particularly useful in evaluation and policy research ([Miles & Huberman, 1994](#)). Purposive sampling enables researchers to use their judgement to select people that will best enable them to answer their research questions and to meet their objectives ([Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007](#)). Data collection was conducted in two phases. A preliminary phase of interviews with stakeholders in southern Cyprus took place from March 2012 to March 2013. Follow-up interviews were conducted in May 2013 including respondents from both southern and northern Cyprus in order to allow comparisons. Overall, 35 interviews were undertaken with stakeholders from different groups including government officers (11), regional tourism board officers (6), private investors (4), non-profit organisations (3), associations (5) and academics (6). The respondents were carefully selected to reflect different sectors of the industry and allow for enriched views. The interviews lasted around 45 min and were recorded with the permission of the interviewees. Questions were framed according to the objectives of the research and included questions related to sustainable tourism development, approaches to implementation and inhibiting factors.

#### 4.2. Data analysis

Frame analysis was used to analyse data whereby emerging topics were grouped into interrelated themes, following a coding scheme. As [Miles and Huberman \(1994\)](#) suggested the transcripts and notes from the interviews were read several times in order to identify key themes. Subsequently, blocks of verbatim text were copied, re-organised and cross-referenced to allow the identification of thematic categories. Overall, findings were categorised into the following themes: a) stage of sustainable tourism development and implementation; b) stakeholders, roles and interests; c) power allocations and its influences; and d) political ideology. Sub-categories also emerged which allowed for greater consistency in structure and elaboration on key issues which encourage evidence-based understanding ([Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011](#)).

#### 5. Findings

We discuss the findings of the study in two sections. In the first section, we describe the roles and responsibilities of influential stakeholders in

sustainable tourism implementation. In the second section, we provide a narrative account of the outcomes of the cross-referencing process displayed in [Fig. 1](#). In particular, an explanation of specific examples of sustainable tourism implementation is provided by considering the influence of multiple actors, their powers and underlying ideology. During the discussion we exemplify the faces of power drawing upon respondent quotations.

### 5.1. Stakeholder identification

In order to understand the nature of decision-making in Cyprus, stakeholders were grouped according to their organisational position (i.e. public sector/private sector) and compared by type of industry and between the two sectors to allow for a more holistic approach.

The public sector has been regarded as the driving force of tourism in both southern and northern Cyprus. In the southern part, the main governmental institution responsible for the tourism sector's development is the Ministry of Energy, Industry, Commerce and Tourism. The responsibilities of the Ministry include the enactment of laws, regulations and policies, the coordination of all governmental departments engaged in tourism development, the approval of tourism plans and the allocation of budgets. The Cyprus Tourism Organisation (CTO), a quasi-governmental organisation supervised by the Ministry, is the primary department solely engaged with tourism. Although in its mission statement the CTO's tasks include tourism planning, product development, marketing and licensing of accommodation, respondents from both the public and private sectors agreed that the organisation has no power in decision-making or policymaking. As one officer from the CTO put it, "*we are only able to influence the development of sustainable tourism indirectly*" in a process of suggesting ideas, policies and regulations to the Ministry despite the organisation's explicit remit to be responsible for sustainable tourism implementation.

Despite the predominant role of the public sector, tourism in southern Cyprus is highly dependent on private investment. Possessing significant financial and land resources, the private sector is regarded as a catalyst for the growth of the industry. Fieldwork evidence identified the accumulative power of industry associations, primarily hoteliers and tourism entrepreneurs, which are frequently consulted in terms of tourism planning. The powerful position of the associations was particularly evident following

the recent financial crisis, when the government consulted members of the private sector regarding the future of tourism. As a manager of an association stated “*we are the active driver for the formulation of comprehensive tourism policies*”. Inevitably, we conclude that the private sector in southern Cyprus is a main influencer on tourism development and a key actor in the second face of power, determining what are legitimate values in tourism development and, as we shall show, using non-decision making to shape power relations.

In northern Cyprus the governmental institution responsible for tourism is the Ministry of Tourism, Environment and Culture, responsible for tourism planning and marketing. An environmental department within the Ministry is also responsible for the maintenance of environmental protection laws and regulations. Respondents from northern Cyprus stated that the ministry is dependent on the Turkish government for sizable investments and/or key decisions regarding tourism development. Consequently, as in southern Cyprus, external political stakeholders are powerful influencers of decisions taken on infrastructural projects and tourism investments. The private sector is divided in two stakeholder groups – the Turkish investors of casinos and holiday resorts attracted to northern Cyprus by the tax reductions and unrestricted construction and licensing procedures and the Turkish Cypriot tourism businessmen, who have formed respective associations.

Whilst the private sector in both southern and northern Cyprus remains an important influence on tourism policy, the government has the final say in decision-making. Hence, the development of a harmonious relationship between the sectors and the alignment of interests is posited as essential for tourism progress. In southern Cyprus, six regional tourism boards based on a public-private partnership structure were established in 2009 to improve decision-making and distribute tourism benefits to local communities. Other stakeholders playing an integral part in tourism development, particularly sustainable tourism, include non-profit organisations such as the Cyprus Sustainable Tourism Initiative (CSTI) in southern Cyprus and the Green Peace Movement in northern Cyprus, which aim to raise awareness on environmental protection and sustainable tourism. However, these organisations remain powerless in terms of decision-making, although the CSTI's influence on tourism development has been increasing following Cyprus' accession in the EU. Lastly, the civic societies of Cyprus are identified as a stakeholder. With community involvement being a prerequisite for sustainable tourism, the lack of awareness in relation to



sustainability and environmental consciousness found in conversations with respondents from both northern and southern civic society groups signposted the weak position of the sustainable tourism policy option.

## 5.2. The politics of sustainable tourism implementation

In order to uncover the factors restricting implementation, the political environment in which tourism development occurs was examined by focusing on power relations among stakeholders, political ideology and socio-cultural stance towards sustainability (see [Fig. 1](#)). Findings are presented separately for southern and northern Cyprus to allow for comparison and contrast between two different political contexts.

### 5.2.1. The case of southern Cyprus

#### 5.2.1.1. Political ideology

The role of tourism was highlighted following the financial crisis in March 2013. With a change in government towards a more neo-liberal political leadership early in that year, priority was given to recovering from the financial crisis through a pro-economic growth approach in tourism development. As a private sector interviewee stated:

*“... the previous government was following a more conservative direction ... the government which is now in power is pro-development ... in all our meetings with the president and the ministers they showed strong support in helping the industry perform its role as a catalyst for the economic recovery of the island”*

Interviewees agreed that the consequences of the financial crisis and the restrictions imposed by the EU and Russia do not allow any criticism of government practices, a typical comment being:

*“The relative large weight given, particularly in the last ten years, to safeguard short-term economic interest unfortunately is expected to increase further in the following years due to the grave economic hardships imposed recently on the Cyprus economy by the Eurogroup and Troika”* (Private sector respondent)

Respondents from the educational sector warned against such developmental approaches, highlighting the challenge present for sustainable tourism implementation under the prevailing circumstances. As a respondent stated *“the Cyprus tourism industry seeks massive growth ... which is not in the spirit of sustainability”*. The lack of awareness on the part

of policymakers of the importance and the benefits of sustainability was identified as a cause of the failure to implement sustainable tourism.

*“Ideologies, from the previous and current government, support tourism development. Nevertheless, they have different approaches towards development and sustainability. The main aspect is that all political forces in Cyprus, except the Green party, support large-scale tourism developments such as casinos, marinas and golf without supporting a programme that would sustain these developments”*  
(Academic respondent)

#### 5.2.1.2. Power relations

Respondents from NGOs lamented the lack of governmental support for sustainable tourism initiatives and argued that attracting the public sector's attention is a challenging process. The lack of governmental support was further highlighted by private sector interviewees who claimed that *“the absence of appropriate infrastructure and incentives for the development and utilisation of sustainable energy”* is evident. As a private sector respondent stated:

*“Cyprus is a small island suffering tremendously by the lack of natural resources, urbanism, and lack of environmental culture, knowledge and education regarding responsible practices”*

Whilst southern Cyprus is obliged to follow EU sustainability regulations, compliance is problematic. A persistent water shortage problem remains unsolved as politicians do not realise the gravity of the situation and possible consequences. *“A lack of coordination and planning at various levels of and between the competent governmental departments, semi-governmental and the local authorities”* further aggravates the situation as each institution follows its own interests, leading to ineffective, inconsistent communication between the parties involved. Consequently, the enforcement of plans and policies is inhibited with certain stakeholders such as local authorities having no tourism orientation.

Therefore, NGOs are following a bottom-up approach whereby they are attempting to introduce minimum sustainability standards in hotels rather than target public sector members. Yet, the necessity of a regulation to encourage the adoption of sustainable tourism practices has been emphasised:

*“The problem with the CTO is that they are not a policy-maker. We need to go to the ministry and governmental level to create policies*

*... in order to do so we start presenting the idea to hotelier associations because they have the financial means. So we need to convince them. We make sure that they understand sustainable tourism and then we try to approach the parliament. The hoteliers, the tourism organisations are the most powerful lobbies” (NGO respondent)*

Interestingly, whilst the responsible Ministry appears to be the legal authority of the tourism sector, an NGO respondent asserted that the true driving force lies elsewhere. As an academic respondent stated:

*“An important stakeholder in the whole sector is the private sector because the hotel and tourism industry is private sector and all the projects are based on private-public partnerships ... How many golf courses we have right now? I think around 14 and they wish to issue another 10 licenses. For sustainable tourism it does not make sense but it means that they (private sector) are very powerful as they have money and want to invest”*

It was reported that to accommodate private sector interests it was not unusual for projects such as the Limassol Marina to be cancelled and then re-announced in an altered form. Similarly, the development of the large-scale luxury Limnis project began in an environmentally protected area, despite its recognition by the EU as a protected Natural 2000 area. Consequently, inequality in power relations between stakeholders is clearly evident. It has not been unusual in the past for private sector actors to sponsor the election campaigns of politicians, raising questions over their probity. The close cooperation between the government and the private sector, particularly hoteliers, was further confirmed by a member of the hoteliers association:

*“Of course whenever a new government is elected we undertake a series of meetings ... with the president of the Republic and the various ministers who have direct or indirect influence in the industry ... we propose various ideas and suggestions which need to be taken in order to improve the situation in the tourism industry. The role and the importance of the tourism sector has been elevated again, following the crisis, as a top priority for the government”*

Through this commentary, examples of Lukes' second face of power are exposed. The recent electoral support for a government in the south extolling neo-liberal values closes down debate on policy direction to non-

controversial values along the lines of, 'the economy is in trouble ... further development is needed ... an unfettered private sector will provide the drivers for recovery'. Non-action, in the form of the cancellation of major projects, further demonstrates how hard won concessions to sustainability principles are cast aside to be replaced by profit-maximising development plans. Furthermore, the stranglehold on power exercised by the private sector is evidenced by the desperate actions of civic societies. Under pluralistic models of power relations, civic interests are encouraged to lobby decision-making bodies, normally, an arm of the state. The lobbying strategy of NGOs in our study, who choose to target the private sector as a route to indirectly influencing the state, confirms the unequal power relations that distort decision making processes. Thus the direct route to influencing government policy is successfully cut-off and the legitimacy of any alternative values in development are suppressed by a self-interested private sector in collaboration with a weakened state.

#### 5.2.1.3. Socio-cultural environment

Hence, it appears that in southern Cyprus sustainable tourism implementation is inhibited by "*dominance in decision-making of short-term economic interests of the private sector and the lack of awareness on sustainability on behalf of the public sector*". This is coupled with the short-term oriented personal relationships and favouritism dominating the society's culture:

*"Greek Cypriots are very short-term orientated, which has its causes in the turbulent history. Projects are orientated towards short-term economic results and there is no targeted strategic acting or decision-making. Decisions are made by considering personal benefits and relations often influence decision-making. People know each other ... Cyprus is a tiny place. There are also issues in terms of taking responsibility ... and there is no true environmental culture and effective waste management in place. All these aspects and values of the society simply collide with the principals of sustainable development"* explained an academic respondent.

A private sector respondent agreed with the short-term orientation but offered the education of different values as a solution stating that:

*"People worry too much about today and neglect to pay attention to what our children will inherit. The greater picture of the consequences*

*of today's actions becomes less important. It will take time and education for everyone to understand”*

These may be genuine sentiments but what they shield, are any explicit recognition of the workings of the second face of power. We concur with the view that the small size Cyprus implies that people within political and economic elites are inevitably interlinked. Our data shows that public and private interaction is shaped by a highly developed system of mutual favours, in which the possession of the right financial background and good interpersonal relations are crucial to success. Personal interests often take a priority over societal welfare, as the executive power of politicians is frequently used to favour their private financial supporters. Societal belief rests on the assumption that politicians abuse their positions to enrich themselves. Thus, it is not surprising that large-scale projects are being approved by channelling state-funded projects into the hands of businesses owned by relatives or friends of politicians. Such culture fosters a system where people with inadequate qualifications are often elected to important public-sector positions and there is a tacit acceptance of established unequal distributions of power. We do not dispute the importance of a sustainable values-based education, but there was no evidence to support any optimism in this respect.

## 5.2.2. The case of northern Cyprus

### 5.2.2.1. Political ideology

To speak of tourism development in northern Cyprus is anachronistic. The primary reason for what might be better termed as underdevelopment is the current political situation. It is best characterised in our analysis as a development vacuum created by both the isolation of northern Cyprus and the absence of any ideological influence, combined with a rapid turnover in political leadership. The political status of northern Cyprus presents an exceptional case in relation to sustainable tourism. As one public sector respondent commented:

*“North Cyprus is a community where there is a lot of political uncertainty ... without being part of the global society or under international law ... nobody is bringing any courage, any access to global sources of money. Enforcing rules and policies which have been developed in stable countries is difficult to apply here. All the things we have learned in university, which are written in theoretical*

*books are not applicable here under these circumstances. Therefore, you need to develop your own model”*

Respondents agreed that the lack of law enforcement in such an unstable environment hinders sustainable tourism implementation. Furthermore, respondents argued that the lack of political vision and leadership, the influence of mainland Turkey and the lack of cultural identity create an environment where sustainability is difficult to flourish. The absence of political stability and security inhibit any form of planned development and as an academic respondent observed:

*“the lack of recognition by the international community and being preoccupied with the Cyprus conflict played a role in putting the development of tourism more or less in the back rather than making it the priority ... This probably resulted in a very slow process in term of market ties, infrastructure, accessibility, planning and laws and regulations”*

#### 5.2.2.2. Power relations

Societal members also showed mistrust of government intentions and ability to introduce change in the industry. For instance, whilst the government has issued financial incentives for agro-tourism development, it did not provide training or advisory support to businessmen. As a result, several agro-tourism establishments closed down due to low occupancy levels. As interviewees stated, sustainable tourism development requires more than financial support. Yet, as the objectives and mentality of the government are incompatible with the principles of sustainability, any future development of sustainable tourism in northern Cyprus appears unlikely.

Moreover, the lack of coordination and cooperation among public sector stakeholders further worsens the situation. With different ministries following their own interests rather than aiming at societal welfare, a form of rivalry among them is evident. The lack of consideration for societal well-being is also inhibited by the pursuit for personal interests. With personal agendas dominating much political decision-making, it is evident that political accountability is absent.

*“It is a small place [...] everybody knows each other, they can easily bypass laws and regulations and build in locations where they shouldn't” explained one academic respondent.*

Interpersonal connections give rise to personal-based politics which in turn lead to constant changes to political mandates. With several public sector employees being appointed according to personal favours rather than academic qualifications, lack of education about tourism is also a key obstacle to sustainable tourism development. As an academic respondent put it:

*“The people in these institutions are sometimes not even qualified for this job. They are somebody's relative or they knew each other or they are party affiliates ... every time political changes occur the previous policy and decisions are forgotten. So there is no continuity”.*

Consequently, any long-term political vision is absent. The success of sustainable tourism implementation is largely based on the enactment of laws, which according to respondents are currently stalled. As one public sector respondent reported:

*“They have passed a law from the parliament [...] a legal framework for stakeholders to be involved in the preparation and implementation of tourism development [...] Who are in the law? The Undersecretary, the Head of Tourism Planning, the Marketing Director, the Head of City Planning and the Environmental officer [...] but they have to prepare a bylaw for the implementation. So, there is a law but no bylaw for the implementation”*

Similarly, another informant agreed that “since we are a developing country we don't have proper policies to conserve those natural areas ... and people want to gain money. They suffered a lot, they don't want to wait” emphasising the lack of legislation or inability of implementing regulations. For example, on the Golden Beach in the Karpaz Peninsula, a Natural 2000 area, building permissions have not been issued, but in 2012 wooden lodging facilities were constructed supposedly for a concert. Despite the protests of citizens and the pressure exercised by NGOs the lodging facilities have not been removed yet, although the event itself was cancelled.

The inability to enforce laws, respondents said, is strengthened by the absence of appropriate planning tools, financial resources and power struggles among stakeholders. As one informant from the education sector explained:

*“They are into tourism, but what type of tourism, what kind of tourism, what vision, based on what plan ... tourism is on autopilot. It is not a*

*lay-down framework based on so-called principals of sustainability. I don't see any strategy or long term vision”*

These examples from the north further illustrate the second face of power on the island. The “mobilisation of bias” (Schattschneider, as cited in [Hall, 2010:204](#)) speaks to the intense ministerial rivalries observed by our respondents that contest to 'organise out' broader social interest. Circulatory and rapid re-shuffles of political leadership ensure the favouring of one faction of interests over another for short periods with debilitating and destabilising regularity. Consequently, non-implementation of approved policy results in the failure to create bye laws to back up primary legislation and change actual development practices.

#### 5.2.2.3. Socio-cultural environment

Although sustainable development is a desired path for some stakeholders, the reality in northern Cyprus indicates that a different route is followed. Central to the discussion on development is the case of casinos, with the public in northern Cyprus frequently accusing the government of turning the island into a ‘gambling hall’. Civic groups in north Cyprus have been opposing further expansion of the casino sector; yet, interviewees acknowledged that casinos are an important income source. Consequently, reliance on gambling tourism remains persistent as the government is forced to choose the developmental approach yielding highest profitability over the sustainable option.

Unsurprisingly, respondents claimed that politicians are unaware of the possibilities of sustainable tourism. An absence of environmental culture among society members further impedes the implementation of sustainable tourism, with many stakeholders and society members taking natural resources for granted. This was captured in the following comment by an academic respondent:

*“They are not terribly active in terms of keeping the places clean, environmental issues are still a problem. I think they don't really have a good waste management. It is more or less a throw-away-culture. I also haven't seen a lot of measures in relation to environmental quality”*

Although NGOs such as the Cyprus Green Movement are trying to educate the society about environmental protection, economic needs prevail. As one private sector respondent remarked *“people did suffer from the situation in*



*North Cyprus. Now they want to earn money, see some changes and don't care about the environment*". Interviewees from the private, public and NGO sectors agreed that the short-term orientation and search for profitability, with little consideration of the future, is a cultural tendency that has been shaped over the years due to the belief that locals have no influence over their own destiny. This cultural mentality is also evident among politicians and as one NGO respondent warned:

*"There should be a cultural and attitude revision among policy-makers and people in relation to tourism development, environment and planning [...] being dependent on Turkey for major policies and strategies [...] and probably also the mentality of policy-makers has remained not terribly dynamic"*

Indeed, respondents from the NGO and academic sectors were generally critical of the lack of government initiative in sustainable tourism arguing that *"the government and ministry play a role on the theatre stage and nothing else. They don't take any initiative to change something"*.

## 6. Discussion

### 6.1. A theoretical frame for further studies of sustainable tourism in complex political contexts

In opening this discussion of our findings we first identify a theoretical frame for further studies of sustainable tourism in complex political contexts. Three mechanisms are identified that shape the politics of sustainable tourism development and both enable and constrain sustainable tourism implementation in Cyprus; namely political structure, socio-cultural environment and external forces. First, sustainable tourism implementation is significantly influenced by the existing political system and prevailing political ideology. Our findings reveal that the failure to implement sustainable tourism is largely the result of incompetent administrations. Second, there is a strong interface between the political system and the socio-cultural environment as they combine to strongly influence sustainable tourism development and implementation. The evidence from the field suggested that the interaction between these two mechanisms is central to a pessimistic prognosis for sustainable tourism. Third, external forces preoccupied by regional security, ideological conflict struggle, territorial disputes and the protection of economic interests, and thus not directly concerned with tourism development, continue to overshadow local tourism policymaking. Thus, the evidence from the study confirms that tourism

policymaking is strongly embedded in the inherent political system and extant power structure of the societies in Cyprus and inextricably related to external forces.

In our view, we have found the multi-layered dimensions of power to be insightful conceptual frames for understanding the politics of sustainable tourism. The examples we present from both the north and south of the island of; agenda manipulation, the non-implementation of policy, and the mobilisation of bias, exemplify, for us, Lukes' second face of power. Our attempts to rise to the challenge of studying political inactivity - the third face of power - demand a more nuanced and tentative analysis. Our thinking on this has invoked the retroductive move to imagine what sits beneath the observable events captured in interviews with respondents as our route to studying political inactivity. At this point we would make the provisional claim that the third face of power sits within the patterns of historical international relations and the contemporary economic influences of external supra-states that shape Cypriot identity. The dependency on Turkish investors in the north, and EU and Russian finance in the south, perpetuate a deeply engrained political consciousness defined by dependence that suppresses any possibility of political self-determination. We suggest that the full power of these interests is not consciously understood across the electorate. Political elites may privately worry about external influences on the island's political future but for the most part subjugate public debate in favour of protecting their own, and by extension of their position, the peoples' economic interests. Thus, our provisional analysis is that the "real interests" of Cypriots - for example to create a peaceful and politically stable unified island in which the values of sustainable tourism may find expression - are hopelessly lost to, "power's third dimension when it works against people's interests by misleading them, thereby distorting their judgement ... such power involves the concealment of people's 'real interests' ([Lukes, 2005:13](#)).

## 6.2. The particular case of the implementation of sustainable tourism on Cyprus

The findings of this study revealed that governments in Cyprus are following a short-term, pro-growth approach to development rather than a sustainability agenda. The causes of this short-term orientation vary markedly between the two sides. Whilst in southern Cyprus the financial crisis and a change in government reinforced the continuation of a pro-growth approach in development, in the northern part lack of political

recognition and economic and political dependence on Turkey create a complex political environment in which sustainable tourism is not a priority. Rather, the dire economic situation highlights the need for economic growth through large-scale tourism development. This confirms previous research findings, arguing that the necessity for economic sustainability favours a pro-growth developmental approach ([Bianchi, 2004](#), [Bramwell, 2011](#), [Daphnet et al., 2012](#), [Logar, 2010](#), [Twining-Ward and Butler, 2002](#) and [Wesley and Pforr, 2010](#)). The findings of this study also confirm [Burns' \(2004\)](#) assertion that political ideology impacts the pace and type of tourism development. For instance, the change to a more pro-entrepreneurship government in southern Cyprus entails the creation of a framework in which development through growth is favoured. Similarly, the constant mandate changes in northern Cyprus elicit instability in the political system leading to weak political leadership.

Lack of efficient planning, coordination and knowledge within the political system act as barriers to sustainable tourism implementation. Respondents in the study have consistently raised the issue of non-qualified government officials acquiring powerful positions through personal association. Consequently, despite the existence of EU funding opportunities for the adoption of sustainable tourism practices, with their carefully cast rules of procurement, this study identified the presence of a deep mistrust from civic society respondents towards government officials and politicians.

The development of a legal framework penalising unsustainable tourism practices could provide the driving force for encouraging sustainability. Yet, the prominence given in our findings to the influence of the socio-cultural environment in shaping tourism planning suggests that those scholars who advocate a government-led approach to the implementation of sustainable tourism should re-evaluate their position ([Bianchi, 2004](#), [Mowforth and Munt, 2009](#) and [Scheyvens, 2011](#)). In the case of Cyprus, socio-cultural values distort a Western ideal of representative democracy, challenging the argument that the state should direct policy because a range of stakeholders are sceptical of the independence of politicians' executive power. In northern Cyprus, for instance, there seems to be a strong influence of Turkish investors on tourism policy. Similarly, our study found that tourism development in southern Cyprus is driven by influential businessmen, who represent an informal element of power and aim at satisfying their personal interests over societal welfare despite the pressure from the EU for transparency in decision-making.

The interaction between the political system and socio-cultural environment is evidenced in the study by a lack of awareness of the potential of sustainable tourism that, in turn, is shaped by an absence of environmental consciousness. Indeed, Cypriots appear to be short-term oriented due, in part, to its turbulent history, and consequently, the development of a long-term vision based on sustainability principles is not actively addressed. Diverse interests, due to the multiple stakeholders involved in tourism, create a complicated setting where power struggles over authority, resource utilisation and decision-making dominate. Governments represent the formal power, yet cases where power was exerted on governments by powerful industrial associations and private sector elites have been noted in this study and elsewhere ([Bramwell and Meyer, 2007](#), [Dodds and Butler, 2010](#) and [O'Brien, 2012](#)). [Yasarata et al. \(2010\)](#) discuss the 'politicisation of the public sector', where politicians use their authority to distribute resources to interested parties as a means of remaining in office, and [Novelli, Morgan, and Nibigira \(2012\)](#) identify the corporate nature of politics, highlighting the dominance of business elites in decision-making. Our data from Cyprus supports these authors' claims.

## 7. Conclusions

The political dimension of sustainable tourism has been largely overlooked. In this article we have made two distinct contributions to the understanding of the politics of tourism. First, in the complex political context of Cyprus we have shown how sustainable tourism implementation continues to be problematic. From our study, we propose a general set of mechanisms that act to enable and constrain the implementation of sustainable tourism. Our analysis has sought to exemplify Lukes' second and third faces of power. We are the first to admit that our attempts go only a small way towards the challenge of studying political non-action. However, these contributions are offered as a possible theoretical frame for further studies of sustainable tourism in complex political contexts. Second, we have made explicit a methodology for studying the politics of sustainable tourism that incorporates key concepts from the extant literature with empirical fieldwork in a novel data analysis framework. Our findings confirm that there is a strong influence of politics on sustainable tourism, to the extent that it cannot be thought of, and debated, without considering the political milieu. In our view, sustainable tourism becomes a melting pot of political argument that is facilitated and constrained by external forces, the political system and the socio-cultural environment.

This study has offered insights into the strong influence of each mechanism on sustainable tourism. External axes of power shape the politics of tourism on the island, thus sustainable tourism cannot escape the wider political agendas shaping the future of the island. The influence of external factors becomes more apparent where local political systems are dominated by fluid ideological struggle, which overlays the power struggles among key tourism stakeholders. In particular, the lack of a well-established political system and the continuous change of governments triggers instability and affect sustainable tourism negatively.

In addition, this study has shown how the interactions between the political system and socio-cultural environment have a strong influence over the politics of sustainable tourism. In particular, the short-term mentalities of the Cypriot societies on the island contradict with the 'sustainability principles' that requires long-term planning. Added to this, are the dominant personal interests and connections that act as the pillars on which the political system of the island is based and consequently negatively influence the prospects of sustainable tourism's emphasis on inclusive governance. An impenetrable jungle of interpersonal relationships between politicians and powerful business elites, who govern the tourism industry, is presently creating undemocratic networks that raise questions over tourism governance structures, destinations management and social learning.

Moreover, we conclude that as power struggles become more intense between global, national and local tourism stakeholders, sustainability discourse requires a more sophisticated consideration of the element of power. Thus, the findings of this study also have implications for a possible further political change - a unified Cyprus. As it stands, with the current institutional and governmental structures as well as external drivers, the complexity of political environment integrated within the socio-cultural environment collude to render sustainable tourism almost impossible. The unification of the island, should it come to pass, will therefore be an important opportunity to influence the society towards the achievement of common, 'politically-free' tourism goals. This will require sociological interventions as well as re-structuring of public and private sector institutions with long-term visions and 'objective' performance driven management approach to tourism development in general and sustainable tourism in particular.

Finally, it is worth noting that the focus of this article has been on the practices of Sustainable tourism development in Cyprus although it is

axiomatic that the study offers general lessons on sustainable tourism development to other small islands whose economies and the tourism industries in particular are dependent upon on bigger countries. The study also offers general lessons to destinations where policy makers, local communities and private sector representatives strive to achieve sustainable tourism but yet face political and socio-economic challenges. However, the study is exceptional as the specific focus of the paper is the relationship between concepts of sustainable tourism development and the ways in which these are implemented in Cyprus involving power dimensions unique to this destination.

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