Good Tourism Policies: Walking the Tightrope

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Tourism policy matters in cultural tourism. The starting point of this paper is the observation that many tourism policy studies draw three inter-related conclusions. One, tourism policy must be inclusive and require the support of different stakeholders (Baker 2009; Bernhard Jørgensen and Munar 2009). Two, a balanced approach to tourism policy is needed to harness the benefits of tourism while mitigating negative effects (Budeanu 2009; Chang 1997; Jenkins 1997; Leheny 1995, Newby 1994; Teo and Yeoh, 1997). Three, tourism policies should accentuate and maintain the cultural uniqueness and authenticity of the destination (Morgan et al. 2011). It seems that many tourism authorities are ignorant of local interests, unaware of the touristification of local cultures and uninterested in promoting local cultures. But local cultures and communities are what that constitute cultural tourism.

Many tourism authorities, on the other hand, have also demonstrated that they are aware of the issues just mentioned (e.g. see Bernhard Jørgensen & Munar 2009; Farsari et al. 2011; Maria 2010; Stevenson et al. 2008). Many of them will concur with researchers on the need to be inclusive, to find a balanced approach to tourism development, to keep the uniqueness and authenticity of local cultural products. The disjuncture between researchers' conclusions and tourism authorities' intentions gives rise to two questions: Are tourism authorities not doing the things they say they are doing? Or are tourism researchers ignorant of the complexity and nuances of policy making and have become too idealistic in their conclusions? This article answers these two questions.

TOURISM POLICY AND COOPERATIVE STAKEHOLDERS

Tourism policies are designed to affect the industry, society and culture. Policies to enhance a destination, for instance, go beyond improving the image of the place, they often aim to attract investments, generate wealth and employment, enhance the local cultural scene and improve infrastructure, among other things. Tourism offers welcomed impacts and also undesirable side-

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effects. Building consensus for policies amongst stakeholders is paramount (Baker 2009; Bernhard Jørgensen & Munar 2009). These stakeholders would include tourism authorities, local government, land control authorities, cultural management agencies, civil groups, politicians and local residents. Without the consultation process, unintended negative consequences on local cultures may result. Besides that, the strategy may not roll out smoothly without the support of various stakeholders. Each set of stakeholders have different interests. So in using Gidden's Third Way, Burns (2004) offers a bipolar view of tourism planning. The first – 'leftist development first' – view focuses 'on sustainable human development goals as defined by local people and local knowledge. The key question driving development is "What can tourism give us without harming us?"' (Burns 2004: 26). The second – "rightist tourism first" – view aims to 'maximize market spread through familiarity of the product. Undifferentiated, homogenized product depends on core with a focus on tourism goals set by outside planners and the international tourism industry' (Burns 2004: 26). In trying to bring different local communities' and industry's interests together, the Third Way conceptually bridges the two poles. In actual practice, how this can work out remains to be seen and tested.

The building of consensus is easier said than done. Different stakeholders should ideally collaborate and cooperate to bring about the common good for society and also enhance their own interests (Baker 2009). There are however challenges. Firstly, from the beginning, identifying relevant stakeholders is a difficult exercise (Currie et al. 2009). For instance, who should constitute a stakeholder group? Or more specifically, which groups of residents should be consulted when developing a new destination brand? Secondly, stakeholder groups may not want to cooperate. For example, in a study of the Copenhagen International Film Festival and the promotion of Copenhagen as a tourist destination, Ooi and Strandgaard Pedersen (2010) show that the organizers of the film festival and the tourism promotion agency are not interested in developing closer collaboration because of their different interests. Closer cooperation may have detrimental consequences for the film festival because it may lose its credibility if it is seen as merely a tourism promotion event. Thirdly, consultation also entails coordination costs. Building up a broad consensus is time consuming and require resources. The eventual proposals may not be effective or efficient. These hurdles give rise to the reluctance of stakeholder groups coming together. Fourthly, even with inclusive consultation, decision and leadership is needed in realizing policy direction and implementation (Budeanu 2009). Official tourism promotion authorities often take up the leadership. But by doing so, certain groups may remain dissatisfied and will blame the tourism

authorities as high-handed, coercive or incompetent (e.g. see Frey and George 2010; Teo and Yeoh 1997). So, inclusive consultative processes are also unlikely to prevent future criticisms.

So, researchers advocate the need to be inclusive in devising and implementing tourism policies. Practitioners agree. But how this principle translates into practice requires more nuanced understanding of the economic, social and political dynamics in how the tourism industry functions. The stakeholder approach sounds right but the good ideas are not translated into practice. This leads to the next point on the balanced approach to tourism development.

TOURISM POLICY AS A BALANCING ACT

Good tourism policies take a balanced approach, meaning they bring in the benefits of tourism, while minimizing the industry's negative impacts e.g. (Chang, 1997; Jenkins, 1997; Leheny 1995, Newby, 1994; Teo and Yeoh, 1997). The negative impacts include problems related to traffic congestion, pollution, wear-and-tear of heritage sites and price inflation (van der Borg et al., 1996). Aspects of the host society may also be commodified and touristified; mass trinketization, for instance, debases local handicrafts (Cohen, 1988). These impacts should be minimized, while its positive economic and social impacts welcomed. So, for instance, Newby defines conceptual relationships between heritage and tourism (1994:208–215), as a continuum along three principal foci: coexistence, exploitation, and imaginative reconstruction. Tourism and heritage coexist when the former does not dominate the local economy. The relationship becomes exploitative when cultural heritage becomes the basis for generating a cash flow. Imaginative reconstruction allows preservation without being swallowed by commercialism. This balanced strategy ensures that the heritage remains "alive", but the lines separating coexistence, exploitation, and creative redevelopment are unclear and subject to disagreement (see (Nyaupane and Timothy 2010;Yan and Bramwell 2008;Yang et al. 2008).

Tourism policies bring social change and economic development. There are different directions and ways society and culture can change and the economy can develop. The balanced approach sounds reasonable but also ambiguous. Negotiation on the way forward takes place amongst tourism stakeholders, resulting in different destinations coming up with their own versions of 'balanced' tourism development (Nyaupane & Timothy 2010; Yan & Bramwell 2008; Yang, Wall & Smith 2008). Consequently, stakeholders with more economic and institutional resources are more likely to be able to further their own agendas (Ooi 2002). As will be elaborated in the case

on Denmark and Singapore later, the formulation and implementation of tourism policies take place within the political economy of the destination.

TOURISM POLICY AS SOCIAL ENGINEERING

Related to the last discussion, tourism policies, by definition, are meant to shape industry, society and culture. In the context of cultural tourism products, issues of authenticity arise; local cultures should not be excessively touristified or commercialized, else they lose their integrity and uniqueness. For example, many destinations are branding themselves and tourism has become a vehicle for tourism authorities to selectively market their destinations and reinvent their destination identities (see (Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride 2011). The crystallized public image may also be introduced to the native population for it to recognize itself (Lanfant 1995; Leonard 1997; Oakes 1993; Ooi 2005). The process of crystallizing the destination's culture and identity may lead to the process of rediscovering, reinventing and reinterpreting local customs and cultures. Arguably then, the tourism industry may insidiously destroy the spirit of the place.

On the other hand, tourism also brings about societal change that is appreciated by locals. For instance, Shanghai is no longer a fishing village or a colonial outpost of the 1930s. Today, it is a beaming metropolis with more than 23 million people. The city is modern. While the city is searching for its soul amidst the tall buildings, highways and shopping malls, the authorities have decided to conserve parts of old Shanghai. The neo-classical colonialist buildings along the Bund have been listed. Yu Gardens – a landscaped traditional Chinese park – and its surrounding area, have been dubbed as "Chinatown" by locals. Newly built ancient-looking Chinese houses and shops clutter the area outside Yu Gardens. In this case, the tourism policy of the city, with the support of urban planning, has maintained and re-invented aspects of old Shanghai. Residents shop there and have come to accept the spruced up Yu Gardens area as quintessentially Shanghai. A new authenticity has emerged.

The social engineering functions of tourism policy are often treated with disdain by researchers. But authenticity emerges (Cohen 1988; Knox 2008; Ooi and Stöber 2010). Culture changes. Cultural change and social engineering are welcomed at times. Considering that local residents may welcome the changes brought about by tourism, the relationships amongst tourism, host society and policy are more complex and naunced than keeping past cultures and heritage. Relating to the balanced approach, when is change brought about by tourism activities acceptable?

CONVERGENCE OF TOURISM POLICYAND PRODUCTS

Art biennales (e.g. in Venice, Singapore, Shanghai), processions (e.g. Berlin's Love Parade, Mardi Gras), spectacular physical icons (e.g. Sydney's Opera House, Eiffel Tower, Beijing's Olympic Stadium), art museums (e.g. New York's Museum of Modern Art, Bilbao's Guggenheim Museum, Doha's Museum of Islamic Art) and the staging of blockbuster musicals (e.g. Mama Mia, the Lion King) have come to glorify destinations. These tourism and cultural products transform destinations. Many are popular with tourists and locals. It is debatable if such attractions make the places more unique. While tourism authorities try to maintain the uniqueness of their destinations, many of their plans actually make their destinations more similar to one another (Ooi 2011). This arises partly because policy makers and industry players copy ideas from other places.

Policy makers and industry players copy because they want to attract more tourists. Tourists are not necessarily looking just for the unique, they also seek out familiar attractions (McIntosh & Prentice 1999; Prentice 2004; Ritzer & Liska 1997; Weaver 2005). The tourism industry taps into the preconceptions and habits of tourists. Thus, Versace, Disney theme parks, Hilton hotels and the like are welcomed into many destinations, and so are familiar tourist attractions like zoos, observation towers and street bazaars. If new types of attractions are proven to be popular (e.g. London Eye), they will be copied (e.g. Eye on Malaysia, Singapore Flyer, both come after London Eye). So today, many destinations have pedestrian walking malls, gentrified disused industrial spaces and art in public places. New tourism developments are often part of wider development plans for the host society, and local residents may welcome them. In sum, while each tourist attraction claims to be unique, the cultural offerings and attractions are primarily similar, this is partly because policy makers and industry players learn from other destinations. And it is not true that tourists are only interested in the unique; destinations can be too exotic to attract visitors. So in devising tourism policy, learning from good practices and using tested formulas from other places are just as important as keeping the uniqueness and authenticity of local cultures.

CASE: DENMARK AND SINGAPORE

To illustrate and highlight the discussion above, comparisons are drawn between Denmark and Singapore. This case is based on data collected since 1996. These two countries approach tourism development differently. Singapore Tourism Board (STB) is the main organ for tourism promotion

in the city-state. VisitDenmark is the Danish counterpart. They both want to increase visitor numbers and bed-nights in their respective destinations. In general, residents in Singapore welcome tourists, and the local media often carry glowing reports on the industry. This contrasts to Denmark. The Danish media often exercise their freedom by criticizing local tourism policies and campaigns.

To illustrate the differences in Denmark and Singapore, in 2009, VisitDenmark launched a viral marketing stunt through Youtube. A two and a half minute video was used, showing a beautiful Karen with her son, August, in arm. The baby is a product of a one-night drunken rendezvous. Karen is now seeking out the father of August. Her goal is just to inform the father of his son, not to demand parental support. The image VisitDenmark wanted to portray is that Danish women are modern and open-minded. There was a public outcry against the clip and the campaign stopped. In contrast to Singapore, STB lobbied for the building of two massive integrated resorts in Singapore. These resorts house casinos, which were disallowed for decades. There was a massive public outcry, unseen in Singapore for decades. Eventually, the tourism arguments prevail and the local media portrayed a amicable acceptance of the casinos at the end (Ooi 2005).

VisitDenmark and STB want to tap into the benefits of tourism, and yet be sensitive to local needs. In Denmark, tourism authorities consider their strategy as primarily "stakeholder-driven" (Bernhard Jørgensen and Munar 2009). The Karen video was not in-tuned with local sensitivities, so the Chief Executive was eventually fired. Tourism policies in Denmark often ended up broad and non-controversial (Ooi 2004; Therkelsen and Halkier 2008). In Singapore, STB provides resources for new tourism projects and have strong governmental backing. Marketing and product development assistance is given to businesses that hold up the official destination blue-print (Ooi 2005). STB is also represented in various cultural institutions, such as the National Heritage Board. So when a new destination branding campaign is introduced, new products and marketing angles are created. Despite their differences, the authorities in Denmark and Singapore see their approaches as 'balanced'. In Singapore, stakeholder consensus is engineered through resources and the mass media. In Denmark, the consensus is reached through discussions, resulting in broad and general policies (see Table).

Table: Comparison of tourism policy approaches in Denmark and Singapore

	Denmark	Singapore
Balanced approach	Policies are broad and all encompassing. Changes to policies are relatively slow.	Policies are focused. New campaigns are introduced with new products.
Stakeholder relations	Primarily consultative	Primarily top-down, with strong leadership demonstrated by STB
Tourism-led social change	Tourism should not change society	Tourism policies are part of country's social engineering machinery
Emerging authenticity	Traditional Danish cultural products remain the mainstay	New products and initiatives are introduced by STB and tourism businesses, seemingly welcomed by locals

The top-down approach of Singapore reflects the soft-authoritarian regime of the country. The authorities provide resources to bring about changes and tourism is seen as part of the country's social engineering mechanism. STB demonstrates leadership and keep coordination costs low when seeking cooperation amongst stakeholders. Local cultural life is transformed in the name of tourism, and this approach generates little audible local resistance (Ooi 2008). The more democratic bottom-up approach of Denmark is cumbersome by comparison. As a result, tourism policies have not changed significantly over the years, and there are also little economic and political resources to bring about changes because tourism is seen as an industry that does not warrant state support. There is thus little incentive for various stakeholders in Denmark to lobby round together. Policies are difficult to implement because stakeholders have conflicting interests. With a vocal and critical media, policies and new products are criticized.

CONCLUSIONS

The comparison between Denmark and Singapore above shows that politics, availability of resources and institutional support matter in tourism policy implementation. The officers in STB and VisitDenmark are aware of the need to be consultative with various stakeholders, to take a balanced approach to tourism development, to maintain the authenticity of their destinations and to sustain the uniqueness of their places. Their approaches are however different. No approach is better or worse because each of them is situated in their own set of circumstances.

The two questions raised at the start are: Are tourism authorities not doing the things that they say they are doing? Are tourism researchers ignorant of the complexity and nuances of policy making and have become too idealistic in their conclusions?

Tourism authorities are aware of the issues. They however have to devise policies within the contexts of their own societies. To them, they are doing what they can to bring about a balanced and sensitive way to tourism development. Tourism researchers are right to point out the shortcomings of tourism policies but they do not often take into account the practicalities and the social and political embeddedness of tourism policies. Researchers contribute to the dialogue with industry through their studies. This dialogue should then lead to a more complex and nuanced understanding of tourism development. Unfortunately, it seems that many researchers and the other tourism industry stakeholders find it hard to keep the dialogue. This is partly because an active dialogue has coordination costs too.

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