

Tourism and Political Change



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Politics and Tourism: Interdependency and Implications in Understanding Change

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2 **Politics and Tourism: Interdependency and Implications in Understanding Change**

C. Michael Hall

Change is as normal in politics as it is in tourism. Yet the relationship between politics and tourism has been a small subfield of the social science of tourism, even though there are many examples of the way that political change has affected the patterns, processes and directions of tourism development. In developing the interconnections between political change and change in tourism this chapter outlines some of the elements of politics and public policy that are determinants or at least influences on tourism, as well as the interrelationships between them. It then highlights the importance of temporality to understanding public policy change. The chapter discusses three different models of policy-making to illustrate that different frameworks approach issues of policy and change in different ways. Finally, the chapter notes the importance of examining the interdependencies between politics and tourism at multiple scales and times.

Political concepts

Politics is concerned with both the exercise of power and influence in a society and in specific decisions over public policy. A common element in definitions is that 'public policies stem from governments or public authorities ... A policy is deemed a public policy not by virtue of its impact on the public, but by virtue of its source' (Pal, 1992: 3). Public policy is what officials within government decide to do or not to do about issues and problems that require government intervention. 'Government' is a term that refers to the legitimate institutions and associated political processes through which public policy choices are made. Unfortunately, the language used to discuss public policy is often confusing. Policy is more than just a written document, although that may represent an important output of a decision and policy making process, it is an extremely broad concept that covers such matters as:

- ◆ the purpose of government action;
- ◆ the goals or ends that are to be achieved;
- ◆ the means to achieve goals, usually referred to as plans, proposals or strategies;
- ◆ the programmes that are established to achieve goals, (the government sanctioned means); and

- ◆ the decisions and actions that are taken with respect to policy, including implementation.

In addition, it is also important to differentiate between public policy *outputs*, which are the formal actions taken by government with respect to policy from public policy *outcomes*, namely, the effects government policy outputs actually have. Thus public policy can be defined as ‘a course of government action or inaction in response to public problems’ (Kraft and Furlong, 2007: 5). The idea of inaction is a key concept in policy studies, for example, Dye (1992: 2) also defined public policy as ‘whatever governments choose to do or not to do’. Such an approach is extremely significant as it is important to recognise that what a government does not do is as important as what it does do. Hall and Jenkins (1995) described tourism public policy as whatever governments choose to do or not to do with respect to tourism. Such state actions with respect to tourism are justified from a number of economic and political rationales including:

- ◆ improving economic competitiveness;
- ◆ amending property rights;
- ◆ enabling government decision makers to take account of economic, environmental and social externalities;
- ◆ providing widely available public benefits;
- ◆ reducing risk and uncertainty for investors;
- ◆ supporting projects with high capital costs and involving new technologies;
- ◆ encouraging social and economic development in marginal and peripheral areas;
- ◆ assisting specifically targeted and often marginal populations; and
- ◆ educating and providing information.

Tourism policy is therefore a course of government action or inaction in specific relation to tourism. It is specific so as to differentiate tourism policy from policies in other fields, such as environment, transport, and international relations that can have enormous impacts on tourism but are not developed as tourism policies *per se*. Such an understanding may, in fact be extremely important for understanding why tourism develops in some ways in some locations but not in others. For example, the creation of a favourable tax advantage for investors because of a government’s foreign investment, taxation and profit repatriation policies may have far greater influence on why some destinations develop at a faster rate than others with intrinsically more attractive attributes for tourists. Similarly, decisions over the location of transport infrastructure, such as airports, railways and roads, which usually fall under the realm of transport policy, will also be critical to the competitive advantage of some locations in tourism development over others (Hall, 2008).

Policy is inseparable from politics. Lasswell (1958) described the situation well when he stated that politics is about ‘who gets what, when and how’. In some political systems politics will also include the electoral processes, the policies of political parties, issue agendas, political ideologies, beliefs, values and philosophies. However, it is important to note that there are different political systems in which western democratic ideas and systems do not apply with respect to ideas of democratic representation and voting, transparency and accountability in government processes, legal standing of the individual in relation to government actions, and competing political parties. Of course this

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