

Re-evaluating a **strategic model** for tourism destinations: Practical implementation of theories and concepts

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Objectives | In this work we seek to identify what we see as a dysfunctional barrier in the development of environmentally and economically sustainable tourism at a local level. Changing shifts in tourism markets have led to the greater importance of sustainable tourism initiatives, which by their very nature will tend to have a locally oriented concept, as opposed to a national or international concept. This particularly applies in the instance of heritage tourism, which has a strong degree of localisation, but which may also engage a wide range of stakeholders – local, regional, national and international. The challenge of resourcing as well of managing these destinations has been intensified by the contemporary economic climate with both capital shortages for tourism providers as well as greater demands for value from tourism clients. The authors therefore saw this as an opportune moment in time to seek to re-evaluate the strategic model for these destinations.

Methodology | The methodology used has been to apply the comparative case studies in such a way as to build evidence of the existence of critical success factors, demonstrated across a range of differing geographical and socio-economic backgrounds. In this way, we seek to develop a general model for strategic evaluation. We have presented exemplars demonstrating the capacity to build strong coalitions of local actors, with the support of key individuals/institutions on a regional/national level, who are able to provide unconditional expertise and support for local initiatives that develop human capacity.

Main Results and Contributions | Our research to date has used four comparative case-studies to consider the potential advantage of locally focused bottom-up tourism models based on coalitions of key local actors over top-down models based on national or international structures. We elaborate the view that top-down models tend to suffer from weakened impact, unfocused resourcing and diffusion of organisational energy at the point of delivery, due to the bureaucratic elements present in such models. Equally, bottom-up models tend to suffer from a lack of professionalism and expertise on the local level, where there is insufficient human capacity to address and resource the critical success factors and resolve

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them in strategic and sustainable manner.

Limitations | Our conclusions and analysis remain work-in-progress; we are currently seeking to elaborate and develop further conclusions based on newly gathered evidence and data. Importantly, our research concerns the intersection between theory and practice, and thus we must always seek to reflect changes and movements in practical applications and how these may influence future theory.

Conclusions | This work is able to demonstrate that theoretical concepts can be seen as applicable in a practical implementation through the use of the case study example. Our conclusions review the use of a strategic model and structure given the importance in minimising and controlling conflicts between local and external stakeholders, to avoid lasting damage to the sustainability and survival of the local heritage.

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¹The references provided are from the first stage of research and additional references will be generated over the next few months as our research continues

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