

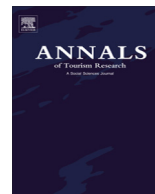


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# Critical review of strategic planning research in hospitality and tourism

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### ABSTRACT

Strategic planning remains one of the most popular management tools, but theoretical and empirical developments in the academic literature have been a slow burn. This paper addresses this gap and provides an up-to-date review of hospitality and tourism strategic planning research. We review strategic planning research from 1995 to 2013 in seven leading tourism academic journals, and adopt a modern and broad conceptualization of strategic planning. While there is some awareness of effective tourism strategic planning processes, academic research has not kept pace with practice. To stimulate a resurgence of research interest, we provide future research directions. We observe a methodological introspection and present some new research methodologies, which are critically important in researching the turbulent, chaotic and nonlinear tourism environment.

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## Introduction

Although strategic planning remains a popular activity within organizations (Rigby & Bilodeau, 2011; Whittington & Cailluet, 2008), it is surprising that the subject has received relatively little attention in the tourism literature (Athiyaman & Robertson, 1995; Gilbert & Kapur, 1990; Soteriou & Roberts, 1998). Despite strategic planning being advocated as beneficial and an agent of change (Fletcher & Cooper, 1996; Franck, 1990; Getz, 1983), the paucity of empirical tourism research is

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peculiar. Whereas, strategic planning was a novelty tool in the 1980s, it has become orthodox practice. Strategic planning is an important management tool for profit and non-profit making organizations in competitive and turbulent environments (Liu, Sigauw, & Enz, 2008). As the world, as we know it, continues to change, the inconsistency between strategic planning popularity in theory and practice is worrying. Recognizing the existence of this dichotomy is important for the future development of strategic planning research.

This study adopts Slattery's (2002) explanation of the hospitality sector and Cooper's (2006) definition of tourism. Slattery (2002) depicts the structure of hospitality as: freestanding (e.g. hotels and cruise ships), operations within leisure venues (e.g. casinos and sports stadia), operations in travel venues (e.g. airports and railway stations) and subsidised hospitality (e.g. workplaces and education). Cooper's (2006) definition of tourism incorporates both public and private sector organizations and their articulation at the destination level. The current economic upturn suggests that tourism will not experience merely another business cycle, but a restructuring of the economic order. During the economic slump for the first time, everyone from the richest person in the richest city, to the poorest person in the poorest slum was affected by the same crisis (Brown, 2010). As Albert Einstein famously quoted "We cannot solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them". Moreover, new strategies are required if organizations wish to prosper and survive new environments (Baden-Fuller & Stopford, 1994; Markides, 1998).

Priem, Butler, and Li (2013) reveal that dynamic interactions often spurred by consumers' expressed, anticipated or latent needs are commonplace in many industries. This study assumes that hospitality and tourism is no exception. Tourism remains a critical economic activity, which continues to grow. More broadly, tourism is a large export earner and major generator of foreign exchange earnings and employment. This growth and increasing competitiveness creates a need for a coordinated and planned approach. Moreover, the financial crisis of 2008 has led to a subsequent global economic downturn marking the beginning of the "new normal", characterised by fundamental changes in the appetite for risk taking, trajectory of globalization, and nature of consumption patterns. Tourism with its links with globalization, governments, business and society has been caught up in this maelstrom, and needs new forms of strategic thinking. This has gained traction through recent publications, such as Song, Dwyer, Li, and Cao (2012), who call for continuous efforts in seeking new tourism approaches, tools and perspectives. From a business and management perspective, Ritchie (1999) draws attention to the growing level of international competition in the tourism marketplace that makes strategic planning increasingly imperative. Liu et al. (2008) mention strategic planning as a fundamental tool for success and survival of a tourist destination. Earlier strategic planning research focussed on tourism enterprises (Athiyaman & Robertson, 1995; Gilbert & Kapur, 1990; Phillips & Moutinho, 2000) with interest in not-for-profit tourism enterprises growing in more recent work (e.g. Soteriou & Coccossis, 2010). Contemporary developments in tourism highlight, the mixed nature of the industry consisting of private firms, public agencies and not-for-profit associations (e.g. Andersson & Gertz, 2009). The mixed industry exacerbates the difficulties of coordinating strategic planning efforts at the destination level.

Traditional tourism destinations have spent the last 50 years developing industrial methods to cope with a growing demand. However, those responsible for strategy have been surprised by the speed and impact of the globalization process, including the internationalization of tourism demand and the emergence of new competing regions. Hospitality and tourism consist of several nuances ranging from being both capital and labour intensive (Olsen, West, & Tse, 2008). The structure of the hospitality field includes globally dispersed units, franchised, managed operations, and independent operators. These units will have differing governance structures and revenue streams for principals and agents. The intangible nature of the tourism experience renders further complications. For example, the generation of a valuable tourism experience depends on the provision of intangible services, which are mainly derived from intangible assets/resources such as knowledge and innovative capability (Voelpel, Leibold, & Eckhoff, 2006). These intangible assets/resources require the adoption of a greater systemic perspective in strategic planning. Moreover, the practice of strategic planning may differ due to influences on national culture, and economic climate.

Tribe (2010) outlines nine differing contexts and uses of strategy in tourism. These range from destinations, trade associations to special events and strategies for specific defined needs. Due to

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