



Creating sustainable tourism ventures in protected areas: An actor-network theory analysis



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Phases of the actor-network theory were deployed for creating a sustainable tourism venture.
- Principal actor's innovativeness and adaptability are associated with the success of a sustainable tourism venture.
- Stakeholder mobilization are essential to overcome resistance to change.

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable tourism is a growing segment of tourism worldwide. If such ventures are to thrive in society, we have to learn more about how they are created and sustained. Specifically, one has to explore, not only the attributes of the founders, but the actions that they deploy in creating such ventures. This paper investigated how a principal actor created a sustainable tourism business in the Amazon forest. The analysis showed that the actor deployed the phases that were proposed by actor-network theory (ANT) framework. Interestingly, the study found that the actor created her network by using what we called an orchestration modus instead of the unification approach that is widely known in ANT literature. Finally, the analysis showed that the ability of the principal actor to learn new things, to adapt to change and her acts of creating spaces for global experts played a significant role in her success.

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1. Introduction

Over the past 30 years, conservationists have looked to sustainable tourism, also known as eco-tourism, as a win-win strategy for protecting the environment while also meeting human needs (Stronza & Pégas, 2008). In this paper, the words eco-tourism and sustainable tourism would be used interchangeably. The World Conservation Union defines eco-tourism as follows: It is environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy, study and appreciate nature, while promoting conservation through low negative impact, and a beneficial socio-economic involvement for the local populations (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1996). Given the expectation that sustainable tourism can contribute to conservation, it has often been viewed as a means for protecting areas such as rain forests and private reserves (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1996). Brazil has 40% of the world's

tropical forests (Peres, 2005) and 13% of the world's biodiversity (Lewinsohn & Prado, 2005). The presence of a huge inventory of natural resources is one of the reasons why conservation-friendly policies were enacted in Brazil as a tool for conserving forests. For example, an effort was made to increase the number of private reserves in the country. Private reserves are private lands, which are owned, funded and operated by a private investor or syndicate, retained predominantly in undeveloped state, and managed for conservation and minimum impact activities, such as nature-based tourism (Pasquini, 2007; Wallace & Pierce, 1996). Private reserves generate income through different activities including, high-end wildlife viewing, captive breeding, hunting, adventure experiences or education programs (Buckley, 2009).

The focus of the present study is to understand how a private individual successfully integrated her passion for the conservation of forests with her desire to become a business owner. The case study is unique because it occurred in the context of the Amazon forests where citizens typically exploit forests to make a living. In this context, it was not uncommon for people to view the goals of

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achieving economic advancement and that of forest conservation as being diametrically opposed. The dominant approach of the Brazilian government, over decades, has been to provide incentives that will encourage landowners to own forests without using them for economic activities. For example, regulations, such as the private reserves law, were passed to encourage landowners to become involved in the conservation of privately owned forests in Brazil (Souza, 2012). The linking of sustainable tourism with forest conservation is an interesting approach because it suggests that conservation and economic growth need not be antithetical ideas.

There two reasons why the current study is needed and relevant. First, there are likely potential economic advantages in developing the sustainable tourism sector in Brazil. For example, the experience of a few countries have demonstrated that private forests, if developed and marketed as ecotourism destinations, could generate economic income from tourists (Kirkby et al., 2010). While the economic opportunity seems to be clear, there is evidence which confirms that forests in Brazil are still largely unexplored from the point of view of sustainable tourism readiness. For instance, in Brazil, less than half (31 out of 67) designated national parks are opened for tourist visits (ICMBio, 2013). Furthermore, only 18 out of the 31 designated parks have proper tourism infrastructures (Medeiros, Young, Pavese, & Araujo, 2011). Contrast these facts with the statistics that 156 million domestic and 5.5 million international tourists visit Brazilian destinations annually (Ministry of Tourism [MTUR], 2013). Therefore, from a domestic economy perspective, there is a reason to explore how sustainable tourism works.

Second, there are also scientific reasons to conduct this study. For example, Sharpley (2009) questioned the degree to which sustainable tourism has been implementation in practice. Similarly, Kruger (2005) argued that researchers need to investigate the conditions under which eco-tourism enhances conservation (Kruger, 2005). After a comprehensive review of sustainable tourism in literature, Buckley (2012) concluded that, with the exception of very few instances (Maxim, 2016), the tourism industry studies strongly focused on economic aspects of tourism, while devoting less little attention to social and environmental aspects of tourism. Furthermore, the roles that champions play during the implementation of sustainable tourism are not yet fully understood (Liburd & Edwards, 2010). Similarly, several authors have noted that the study of sustainable tourism is still a less researched area (Dodds, & Butler, 2010; Farsari, Butler, & Szivas, 2011; Liburd & Edwards, 2010). Hence, there seems to be a disparity between the theory and practice of sustainable tourism (Muangasame & Mc Kercher, 2015; Waligo, Clarke, & Hawkins, 2013), and seeming contradictions between stakeholder interests, governments policies, and structures (Krutwaysho & Bramwell, 2010). Araújo and Bramwell (2002) defined stakeholders by their geographic level, as local, regional and national stakeholders. Hence, this study responds to these calls for research of the sustainable tourism phenomenon (Farsari et al., 2011).

Increasingly, the actor-network theory (ANT) has been adopted as an important analytical framework for tourism research (Arnaboldi & Spiller, 2011; Franklin, 2004; Johannesson, 2005; Van der Duim & Van Marwijk, 2006; Van der Duim, 2007). ANT was adopted as the most appropriate for this study because it focuses on the relationships between non-humans and humans, which is central to the accomplishment of a sustainable tourism ventures. Furthermore, prior studies have shown that ANT is useful for understanding tourism phenomena. Actor-network theory (ANT), proposes that a network's outcomes are linked to the collective interactions between its actors and non-human entities. It posits that some actors act as translators when they create heterogeneous associations between human- and non-human entities. A network

is created by a chain of actions (Callon & Law, 1997; Latour, 2005), during which humans and non-humans are interested and enrolled. The understanding of the processes that a translator deploys to create a network is helpful for understanding how the investigated phenomenon occurs. One of the primary goals of this research is explore and expose the actions that the founder of a sustainable tourism venture used to build her venture. Specifically, the study will investigate if the phases of the ANT framework were deployed when the principal actor founded her venture. In this way, the study will explore *what* the principal actor did to create the venture. However, the analysis will also seek to uncover *why* the actions worked. Specifically, the analysis will explore decisions of the actor and the contributions of the members of the network that made the venture a success.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. The next section will highlight the actor-network theory and its link to sustainable venture development. The paper will then present the context of the study and followed by a synopsis of the actor and the venture. The paper will then present the case study methodology adopted for the research and the results of this study. Lastly, the work will discuss the results and highlight its main conclusions and future research directions.

2. Actor-network theory and sustainable tourism venture development

The ANT theoretical framework was developed to help us understand how (new/disputed) scientific knowledge becomes closed and new actions and methods become accepted and adopted. The theory involves the investigation of the actions that actors use to mobilize allies and resources, and to construct heterogeneous networks (Garrety, 1997; Latour, 1987).

For example, the actor-network theory approach enabled Latour (1983) to unveil the role that enrollment played in the success of Pasteur's scientific career in 1881. Latour's (1983) work highlighted how Pasteur convinced other actors that his work, and his work alone, would provide a cure to a specific disease. Callon (1986) also used of the actor-network approach in a study of the practices of the scallops industry in St. Brieuc Bay. He used the actor-network theory analysis to understand how marine biologists enrolled the local fishermen and scientific colleagues in their attempt to preserve a population of scallops. The ANT approach was also used to explain why the network failed once a few of the actors departed from it (Callon, 1986). Rodger, Moore, and Newsome (2009) found that the actor-network translation phases of problemisation, intersement, enrolment and mobilization were helpful for understanding the formation of a wildlife tourism research network and to understand the disbanding of the network. Paget, Dimanche, and Mounet (2010) used the actor-network theory for understanding the evolution of innovation in a French ski resort. The researchers found that the leader played the role of translator, by interesting and enrolling actors for the project.

According to ANT, a volitional actor, also called an actant, could be any agent, collective or individual, who can associate with or dissociate from other agents. Actors enter into networked associations which define them, name them, and provide them with substance, action, intention and subjectivity (Ritzer, 2005). Networks consist of processes and activities that are performed by actors and relationships between actors. A translation is the process of establishing identities and the conditions of interactions among actors (Ritzer, 2005). During the translation process the principal/focal actor works to transform heterogeneous entities into an unified network. Such a network could consist of people, organizations, machines, animals and other entities, who are unified behind a single/common mission (Latour, 1996; Law, 1991).

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