THE TYROLIAN WAY: A FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPING A SUSTAINABLE TOURISM POLICY

Abstract. This research paper takes up the call for a more active role of tourism researchers in tourism policy and planning processes by presenting an action research account on the latest tourism planning and policy process of the region Tyrol, Austria. The findings discuss the results of this process based on the three-layers of: (1) imaging a tourism vision, (2) developing major guidelines and guiding measures, and (3) defining a multidimensional performance measurement. The methodology details the research and planning process by describing the interventions, workshops and data-gathering approaches. The contribution outlines how researchers can engage and contribute to tourism policy and planning processes, and how a policy process can incorporate economic, social and environmental goals. The discussion provides a critical reflection on the benefits and challenges of a research-lead tourism policy process.

1   INTRODUCTION

The aim of a tourism policy is to provide a strategic framework for governing the sustainable development of destinations (Beritelli et al. 2007). A tourism policy is usually the result of a government-led strategic planning process that involves a multitude of actors and stakeholders (Carlisle et al. 2013), and follows the steps of idea generation, policy development, implementation and evaluation (Dredge & Jamal 2015). As a result, a destination policy typically articulates a tourism vision for the destination, development objectives, fields of actions and a framework for evaluation.

Despite the complexity of tourism policy development processes, tourism researchers tend to play a marginal role in this process. Thus, leading scholars have underlined the need for linking policy research with policy practice and called to "bridge the theory-practice dichotomy" through active engagement of academia in tourism policy and planning processes (Dredge & Jamal 2015, S. 295). This research paper takes up this call for a more active role of tourism researchers in tourism policy and planning processes by presenting the tourism policy process of the region Tyrol, Austria in which researchers played an active role as facilitators and moderators.

This paper presents the results of an action research account (Argyris & Schön 1989) of the tourism planning and policy process of the region Tyrol, Austria. The outcome of this study is "The Tyrolian Way", a tourism policy-process model that is characterized by the

inclusion of multiple stakeholders in the policy process, data-driven decision-making processes, and equal appreciation of economic, social, and ecological goals. Key interventions and data gathering approaches are discussed in the methods section. The findings are structured around the three layers of the policy process and present corresponding key measures. The contribution of this research outlines how researchers can engage and contribute to tourism policy and planning processes, and how a tourism policy can incorporate economic, social and environmental goals.

2   METHODS

This research project is grounded in the basic premise of action research. The purpose of action research is to develop theories about the organization and about the change process that produced it. The researchers used a variety of methods. Means of data collection included desktop research, a survey of the local population, a qualitative study on tourism and agriculture, interviews with non-tourism stakeholder groups such as the chamber of architecture, alpine clubs, disabled people organizations) and special surveys with experts and key decision makers (DMO directors and CEO's, representatives of the Chamber of Commerce, tourism consultants, hoteliers, cable car company managers, campground managers, mountain guides, local museum managers, leisure facility managers and travel agencies).

The tourism policy planning process represented an iterative process consisting of recurring loops of desktop research, surveys, discussions and refinements in the core team, and presentations and discussions with industry representatives and experts. In total, the project comprised three major loops over the course of one and a half year. The first loop started with an evaluation of the previous tourism policy and the identification of key elements of the new tourism policy which include an updated holistic vision statement, guiding principles and concrete measures. Within the second loop, the first draft of the Tyrolian Way was reviewed with the industry representatives and experts. The final loop was characterized by an extensive exchange with the local government and organizations who were potentially responsible for the implementation of measures. The following section provides a brief overview of the key measures that were developed as a result of this collaborative process.

3   FINDINGS

The Tyrolian Way (Siller et al. 2021) is a tourism policy that consists of the three layers vision statement, guiding principles, measures as well as a performance measurement framework. What makes the Tyrolian Way distinct from other tourism policies is the collaborative development process, the inclusion of all three sustainability dimensions and the multidimensional performance measurements. Furthermore, emphasis was put on

implementing the Tyrolian Way as an ongoing process with the intention to constantly add new measures and to keep an active exchange with stakeholders. This section provides a brief overview of selected key results and measures of the Tyrolian Way (Siller et al. 2021). A full version of the Tyrolian Way is accessible online via www.tirolwerbung.at/tiroler-tourismus/tourismusstrategie.

Layer 1: Imaging a tourism vision for Tyrol

The first step of the policy process was the development of a vision statement for Tyrolian tourism. From the results of the intensive exchange with the numerous stakeholders and the resulting objectives, "the self-image" of Tyrolean tourism consists of the elements of *sustainability, connection* and *lifestyle*. First, Tyrol stands for "a balance of economic, social and ecological sustainability" (p.17). Second, the Tyrolian Way acknowledges that Tyrol is an alpine region with one of the best combinations of nature, movement and mountain experience worldwide. Nature and landscape experiences, activity and sport, but also enjoyment, and a certain degree of alpine idyll are the central motives of guests for a vacation in this alpine region. Third, Tyrol is seen as "the epitome of alpine lifestyle" (Siller et al. 2021). This alpine lifestyle is associated with both appreciating and protecting "an alpine mountain world", and a certain "steadiness, openness, straightforwardness and joie de vivre" of its inhabitants (Siller et al. 2021, S. 17).

Layer 2: Developing four guiding principles and key measures

The second layer comprises four guiding principles that represent the base for the development of tourism in Tyrol. Each principle is accompanied by a detailed description and concrete measures. The four principles are (1) "Living Space and Recreational Space", (2) "Sustainability and Regionality", (3) "Family Businesses and Hosting Quality", and, (4) "Competence and Innovation Leadership" (Siller et al. 2021, S. 19).

"Tyrol as a living space" acknowledges that Tyrol is "a living space, a recreational space and an economic region at the same time" and that "tourism takes place in the real life of the population and not in a delimited, artificial vacation setting. The special features of this living space and the details of its identity shall be recognized, appreciated, promoted, and linked with the tourist offer and made accessible in an authentic way." (p. 20). Guiding measures include dialog forums with the local population and stakeholders, a quantitative growth limit for the accommodation industry, high standards of spatial design and architecture and " a respectful use of space" addressing visitor management, protection of the natural environment and consideration for agricultural processes (Siller et al. 2021, S. 20). The guideline "Sustainability and Regionality" contains measures for the implementation of a "multidimensional sustainability strategy" (Siller et al. 2021, S. 23) for all Tyrolian destinations, the aim to achieve climate-neutral ski resorts and on-site mobility by 2035, and

to strengthen the cooperation between agriculture and tourism in terms of regional economic cycles. The guideline "Family Businesses and Hosting Quality" acknowledges that family firms are a central success factor of Tyrolian tourism. The concrete measures focus on current management issues in family businesses such as succession, digitalization, the implementation of sustainability measures, tourism education and employee shortage.

Layer 3: Defining multidimensional performance measurement

The last layer develops a multidimensional key performance indicator dashboard. The new Tyrolian Tourism Dashboard combines traditional key performance indicators such as overnight stays, arrivals and length of stay with criteria of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC-DC). The overall aim is to track the tourism process in its economic, social, and ecological dimensions(Siller et al. 2021, S. 27). This monitoring of Tyrolean tourism shall contribute to a better understanding of the tourism industry and a transparent, data- and evidence-based control of fundamental tourism processes.

4   CONCLUSION

It has been remarked that tourism researchers tend to play a marginal role in tourism policy processes. This research project takes up the call for more active engagement of tourism research in tourism policy and planning processes (Dredge and Jamal, 2015) by presenting the Tyrolian Way – a tourism policy process where a regional tourism research institution played a leading role, and a team of senior researchers were responsible for structuring, guiding and executing the project.

A critical reflection on this research-lead tourism policy process reveals a number of benefits and challenges. On the one hand, the researchers were perceived as neutral, trustworthy actors, without a political agenda. This allowed attracting a number of critical and non-tourism stakeholders for participation (e.g. chamber of architecture, environmental organizations and agricultural associations), and designing a data-driven discussion and decision process that was guided through current research findings. The researchers could include a number of socially and environmentally important landmark decisions and measures, some of which are unpopular for the local tourism and leisure industry.

On the other hand, this one and a half-year process revealed a number of challenges for research-driven tourism policymaking processes. It turned out that it was challenging for the researcher team to maintain their independence and their perceived objectivity throughout the process. As project leaders, the researcher team had to make decisions. This included decisions regarding whom to incorporate in the process, and whom to exclude, what topics to address, and which to drop, and finally, which measures to adopt. This novel role of researchers led some participants to raise resentments regarding the role of tourism research

in general, some stakeholders felt left out, and others expected a tourism policy that is more oriented on short-term economic interests of the local tourism industry.

A central challenge for the research team was to remain steadfast in the face of political pressure and the industry's interests. Being in a project leadership role means to step out of the comfortable position of a neutral researcher, but provides the opportunity to demonstrate the value of research to tackle current issues in sustainable tourism policy development. For tourism policy and planning research, this action research project can serve as an example of how to overcome the tourism research and praxis gap. This concerns the role and perception of tourism research within the local tourism industry and the establishment of a more objective and multidimensional performance measurement. Especially the latter provides a promising field for applied tourism research.

5   ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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