

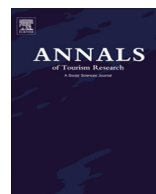


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# The dynamics of tourism discourses and policy in Brazil



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### ABSTRACT

This article employs a Foucauldian inspired discourse analysis in order to unveil hidden aspects of the tourism development policy-making process in the UNESCO Espinhaço Range Biosphere Reserve, Brazil. It identifies the emergence of different representations of tourism development and demonstrates the process of social construction of sustainable tourism as an overarching discourse, which incorporates different—sometimes opposing—representations of tourism development to gather the support of people with different backgrounds and interests. However, this research demonstrates that this flexibility caused the sustainable tourism narrative to become a vague and imprecise discourse in the context of the case study, which has been used by the regional elites to conserve the status quo, but disguised as a critical alternative perspective.

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### Introduction

As recorded by Tribe (2008), tourism research is largely dominated by positivist research underpinned by a technical rationality seeking to inform a more effective operational management

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of tourism business (see also Franklin & Crang, 2001; Hannam & Knox, 2010). However, Tribe suggests that a more critical tourism agenda is essential for addressing the ethical, governmental and deep sustainability of tourism as research and practice. A critical turn has emerged in tourism studies precisely to address these issues (Ateljevic, Pritchard, & Morgan, 2007); however, this has been dominated by cultural approaches (Williams, Hall, & Lew, 2004), which left the critical political economic realm of tourism development under-researched (Bianchi, 2009). In this paper, we respond to this agenda by applying an interpretive/discursive policy analytical approach to examine 'meaning-making' within a contested tourism governance arena. Specifically, we examine the shifting representations of tourism within regional/local policy arenas and how these relate to wider narratives of development pathways and sustainability within an ecologically sensitive context, in the Espinhaço Range Biosphere Reserve (ERBR) in Brazil. In order to do so, a conceptual framework was developed, drawing on environmental policy and planning literature, inspired by Foucauldian discourse analysis, to describe the process through which meanings emerge in actors' interactions until they gain 'traction' and support to begin to influence the structures of power, generating outcomes in terms of policy and action. By using interpretive policy analysis, this paper explores the micro-political and social processes through which policy is constructed (Healey, 2000; Murtagh & McKay, 2003; Rydin, 2005).

The main objective of this paper is to understand the process through which policy outcomes are generated by competing rationalities of tourism development, and what happens when these rationalities and outcomes are confronted with economic activities that are more capable of contributing to the dominant modernization discourses of development. In the case of the ERBR, the Chinese demand for iron ore has caused the flourishing sustainable tourism programme to be challenged and displaced by mining in the 2000s. Specifically, this article presents a novel focus on the intersections between discourse and rationality to explain the multi-directional influences that shape debates concerning tourism and development and the decisions that ensue from them.

### Critical tourism development policy-making and governance

The literature on tourism development and policy-making has received important contributions in recent decades that challenge the former hegemonic business-centered research paradigm. These contributions focus on more decentralized and collaborative bottom-up policy processes, which drawing on the concept of governance, focuses on multilevel and multi-actor participation (Bramwell, 2011; Hall, 2011; Healey, 1997). In addition, the centrality of power in policy making has been recognized (Mowforth & Munt, 2009). Among these contributions, new institutionalist derived relational approaches are employed in Bramwell and Meyer (2007), Pastras and Bramwell (2013) and Krutwyscho and Bramwell (2010) to address the dualism between agency and structure, to institutional coordination and policy implementation respectively. The perspective of the tourism policy-makers is addressed by Airey and Chong (2010) with regards to the evolution of tourism policies in China and by Stevenson, Airey, and Miller (2008), who employ grounded theory to identify the importance of intangible, complex and contextualized elements of the policy process, while the need of collaborative structures to mediate conflict among actors' perspectives is addressed in Lee, Riley, and Hampton (2010). In a similar approach, Bramwell and Sharman (1999) develop a framework to analyze how collaborative institutional arrangements can reduce the power imbalances among stakeholders (drawing on the work of Jamal and Getz (1995)), and Dredge (2006) employed network theory to study the collaboration between actors in a tourism policy context. These important contributions illustrate the extent to which the literature on tourism development and policy-making has explored different actor's roles and perspectives and the role of collaboration in tourism policy making. What this literature lacks is a more discursive treatment of tourism development and policy-making. While there is tourism research which focuses on discourse and representation, this has tended to deal with how tourism discourses are derived and reproduced in order to present places (Echtner & Prasad, 2003; Salazar, 2006; Yan & Santos, 2009). However, there is currently a dearth of critical literature linking discourse and representation to tourism development and policy-making, particularly in the context of the political economy of tourism (Bianchi, 2009; Williams et al., 2004).

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