

Research Paper

Policy, Government Strata and Sustainable Tourism of a Rural Destination: An Analytical Network Policy Perspective

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Abstract: Sustainable tourism policies in rural destinations are often complex. Governments strive to ensure that the objectives of sustainable tourism are met through various strata of agencies. As a result, institutional fragmentation has become the undesirable outcome of this approach. The policy Delphi technique was employed in this study to align decision-making divergence between local, state and federal governments for sustainable tourism aspirations in Sabah, Malaysia. The results reveal vastly divergent perspectives from actors representing the triple-tier governmental system. The findings indicate that the curtailment of the policy cycle is due to knowledge gaps coupled with on-site complexities. The paper suggests that the administration of policies could be based on a system that allows timely rectification, indicating the need for a dynamic policy cycle for multi-stage amendments when on-site complexities are identified. The perspective of this paper is that of the policy-analyst, proposing an analytical network policy process that allows timely rectification of policies.

Keywords: Governance, actor network theory, policy Delphi, 3-tier law-making, dynamic policy cycle

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Introduction

Tourism is an important component in promoting a country (Amir, Ghapar, Jamal, & Najiah, 2015) and seen as a catalyst in supporting local development through social, cultural and economic benefits (Atun, Nafa, & Türker, 2018; Nair, Munikrishnan, Rajaratnam, & King, 2015; Qiu, Fan, Lyu, Lin, & Jenkins, 2019; Siow, Ramachandran, Shuib, & Mohammad Afandi, 2015). The tourism industry comprises a fragmented group of diverse players from different organisations with ownerships represented by local, national, and transnational agencies and governments (Baum & Szivas, 2008). The importance of understanding tourism policymaking and implementation has been highlighted by researchers due to the diverse players engaged with the policy narrative as well as the multi-faceted and interdisciplinary nature of the industry (Baum & Szivas, 2008; Wang & Ap, 2013). Tourism planning and policy may be deemed a significant influence on how tourism develops and engages with the distribution of power, benefits and impacts (Dredge & Jamal, 2015). The effective governance of the tourism policy lies in the distribution of power, understanding of resources and rules, and coordination amongst actors (Bramwell, 2011). This paper examines the tourism policy in the 3-tier Malaysian governmental structure that influences the policymaking process and the effectiveness of the intended policies in Semporna, Sabah Malaysia. The discussion of this paper focuses on interpreting the challenges faced by policymakers as a result of the current policy-cycle practices of the policymaking process.

Public policy is defined as “an intentional course of action followed by a government institution or official for resolving an issue of public concern” (Cochran, 2009, p. 2). This is an expression of what the government wants to achieve as policies engage and impact on a wide variety of stakeholders and their interests compared to private decision-making (Birkland, 2001). Policy is rarely a single action, but more of a dynamic process that is coordinated to achieve an intended objective (Siow, Ramachandran, Ahmad, & Syamsul Herman, 2013). Public policy is rooted in law while authority and coercion are associated with law (Cochran, 2009). Malaysia is a country that is ethnically heterogeneous and is recognised as having an enviable model for public policy debate and formulation within the region (Asher, Newman, & Snyder, 2002). Nevertheless, demands for reforms in public policy in Malaysia has gained popularity as the changing landscape is fuelled by an ageing population, the need for better infrastructure and concerns for sustainable consumption practices (The Association of Chartered Certified Accountants [ACCA], 2017).

While public policies on tourism reflect the general state of governance in a country, rural tourism policies fall under the area of public policies being a set of regulations, rules and guidelines, directives, as well as developmental or promotional objectives and strategies that provide a framework which accommodate collective and individual interests (Hahti, 2001). Sharpley (2002) postulated that rural

tourism policies serve as a mechanism to attract more diverse high-spending markets, mitigate problems of seasonality, encourage independent and non-organised tourism, spread the socio-economic and cultural benefits of tourism, and promote the alleged demand for more environmentally appropriate forms of tourism. As such, the development of sustainable rural tourism is seen as complex and contemporary because it involves balancing economic, environmental and social requirements (Dragulanescu & Drutu, 2012).

To achieve the objective of this paper, the first section will discuss key literature sources that contribute towards our understanding of effective policymaking. The literature on public policy and sustainable tourism as well as the understanding of the Malaysian government system seeks to determine the limitations of the planning and the administration of public policies in Malaysia.

The study identified the use of the Actor Network Theory as an underpinning theory to bridge the gap between multi-disciplinary, multi-agency and multiple levels of government in the policy planning and administration process. This approach is considered in the second part of the paper. The study used the policy Delphi technique for data elicitation, and to converge and identify emerging themes among policymakers. Semporna, Sabah, Malaysia was selected as the case study for this paper as the study site exhibits a range of sustainable tourism issues that require urgent attention.

The final section of this paper aims to establish a policy-network system. This system, called the analytical network policy process, anticipates the shortcomings in the unidirectional policy cycle and hence, offers a better platform for policymakers in policy intervention and decision-making of rural tourism destinations in Malaysia.

The significance of this study is to assist policymakers identify efficient methods in the policy formulation process, given the circumstances of the 3-tier government system and associated on-site complexities. This significance also includes the impending issues due to COVID-19, which spotlighted the country grappling with agency-coordination, demand-driven changes in policy, and the inability to be agile with the existing policies (Hanafiah, Balasingam, Nair, Jamaluddin, & Zahari, 2021).

Literature Review and Theoretical Underpinning

Public Policy and Sustainable Tourism

The components of sustainability fall into the wide categories of environmental sustainability, economic sustainability and social equity (Atun et al., 2018; Ho, Chia, Ng, & Ramachandran, 2013; Schively, 2008). Thus, sustainable tourism can be defined as a form of tourism that meets the requirements of present generations without compromising the capacity of subsequent generations to meet their own needs (Bramwell & Lane, 2011). Reducing these impacts is the cornerstone of sustainable development; however, the practical applications and complexities are

always challenging for policymakers to address (Ng, Chia, Ho, & Ramachandran, 2017; Siow, Ramachandran, Shuib, & Mohammad Afandi, 2014a; Waligo, Clarke, & Hawkins, 2013).

Public policy and planning are created out of the requirement for collaboration in tourism planning, where it has been identified as a major issue in sustainable tourism development (Brendehaug, Aall, & Rachel, 2016; Erkuş-Öztürk & Eraydın, 2010). Tourism policy serves two purposes, namely to provide maximum benefits to the stakeholders of the region, while minimising negative impacts (Chaisawat, 2006). Sustainable tourism policies present the greatest value when they comprise a workable definition, principles, implementation strategies, action plans and an evaluation system for sustainable development (Choi & Sirakaya, 2006; Whitford & Ruhanen, 2010). However, what constitutes these policies is an ongoing debate (Whitford & Ruhanen, 2010) and is subject to many meanings and interpretations due to the perceptions, expectations and objectives of the policymaker (Siow, Ramachandran, Shuib, & Mohammad Afandi, 2014b). Lack of resources, inadequate coordination amongst policy actors and low comprehension by decision makers have led to gaps in tourism policies (Dela Santa, 2013). However, many attempts to improve policies have suffered from a gap between on-site reality and theory (Hallsworth, 2011). The effectivity of public policy has to address the complexity of the multi-façade tourism system. This means that an adaptive, non-linear and continuous policy should be paired with the diversity of the involved stakeholders (Stofellan, Adiyia, Vanneste, & Kotze, 2020).

The Influence of the Government System in Malaysia

Policies for tourism exist at all levels of governments, comprising of the federal, state and local levels. A key question is whether the agencies' involvement is active, laissez-faire or somewhere in between. The development and planning of these policies varies according to the perceived importance of tourism and the contribution of tourism as a sector within the national or local economy (Baum & Szivas, 2008).

Malaysia practises parliamentary democracy with a constitutional monarch with His Majesty the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, as the Supreme Head of the country. Parliamentary democracy operates as the basis of government administration in Malaysia (MyGovernment, 2014). The government manages the country's formulation, establishment and implementation of policies, amending them from time to time in relation to the type of government, political system and economic development status (Omar, 2014). Malaysia's governmental structure encompasses a 3-tier operational structure comprising of the federal government, 13 state governments and 144 local governments. Part VI of the Federal Constitution stipulates the relationship between the Federation and states, stating that the federal domains of authority are in the country's economic development, health, education,

security, defence and immigration. The states' list of authority includes Islamic law, agriculture, forestry, land, local government and water (Saleem, 2005).

The federal government has 25 ministries with a total of 1,532 agencies across all ministries and states (MyGovernment, 2014). According to the Malaysia Business Law Handbook (2012), the Malaysian government established various agencies to ensure that the objectives of the government are met. The government administrative structure consists of three levels: ministries, departments, and statutory bodies. At the ministry level, the functions of the main agencies are to formulate, control and implement policies. At the department level, however, their role is solely policy implementation.

At the state level, the Sultans are the constitutional heads of their respective states, and the various state governments are led by elected chief ministers while state assemblies have responsibilities restricted to land and religious matters (Hutchinson, 2014). Recognising the different economic structure and demands for greater autonomy (Hutchinson, 2014), exceptions were given to Sarawak and Sabah. The state governments have additional powers over immigration and labour matters (The Malaysian Bar, 2011).

A study of policy implementation within Malaysia's centralised governmental system illustrates that there is lack of coordination due to the different agendas of stakeholders, conflicts of interest, lack of dedication for policy enforcement, different interpretation of policies, and multi-agency policy enforcement (Eusofe & Evdorides, 2017). The inter-organisational relationship of policy implementers is complex. This complexity is a result of horizontal and vertical organisational structures causing less-than-smooth and cordial relationships between federal, state and local level governments. Furthermore, the decentralised decision-making process is further intensified by the nature of the industry as sustainable tourism-related policies are embedded in a number of non-tourism domains. In this regard, the lack of synergy in the administration and the fragmentation of agencies are taking its toll on the efficiency and effectiveness of the policy system in Malaysia (Raja Ariffin & Zahari, 2013).

Actor-Network Theory

The lack of synergy in the 3-tier governmental system is an issue of concern. Tourism policy demands the inclusion of multiple stakeholders (Atun et al., 2018; Baum & Szivas, 2008), ranging from government agencies, tourists, tour operators, tourist related businesses, NGOs, local communities, and professionals (Choi & Sirakaya, 2006). Sustainable tourism policy in rural destinations becomes more complex as it not only requires the inclusion of heterogeneous stakeholder relations but also sustainable practices (Dragulanescu & Drutu, 2012).

The actor-network theory or ANT, an approach developed by Callon, Latour and Law (Mouritsen & Justesen, 2011; Murdoch, 1997) in social studies that

transcends the dualism by investigating is a patterned network of heterogeneous relations. The constructivist approach is an effect produced by such human and non-human networks (Mouritsen & Justesen, 2011). The fundamental importance of ANT does not divide humans and non-humans with the intention to understand the simultaneous presence of different “agencies”. These agencies can be humans, machines or text, treated as a heterogeneous actor-network (Plesner, 2009). In ANT, the actors are assembled from various sources that include humans and non-humans, mechanical and technical objects, or human knowledge (Winiiecki, 2009).

In recent years, ANT has been recognised as an important analytical framework to study emerging tourism projects (Arnaboldi & Spiller, 2011; Rodger, Moore, & Newsome, 2009; van der Duim, 2007) and policies (Rodger et al., 2009). This theory guides tourism scholars on how and what to study (Van der Duim, 2007). ANT establishes important insights for sustainable tourism research policies by providing a possibility to bypass dualism, taking into consideration the significance of human and non-human relationships in the concepts and practices of tourism. It provides the capability to deal with the complexity of multiple stakeholders with the hybrid networks of sustainable practices (Jóhannesson, 2005).

A Unidirectional Policy-Cycle Approach

The policy-cycle process, an idea broached by Harold Lasswell (1980), evolves through a sequence of discrete stages and phases. There is emphasis on the feedback loop, leading to a perpetual and continual cycle (Hallsworth, 2011; Hill & Varone, 2014; Jann & Wegrich, 2006). This cycle identifies multiple actors as players in this process, with 5 distinct stages. The five stages (Figure 1) in the policy cycle are agenda setting, policy formulation, policy adoption, policy implementation, and policy evaluation (Harris, Sainsbury, & Kemp, 2014). Table 1 briefly describes each stage of the policy cycle.

Table 1. Stages and description of the unidirectional policy cycle

Policy-cycle stages	Description
Agenda Setting	Competition of ideas and policies are shaped to attract the attention of policymakers to find a resolution to a problem (Kalu, 2004). The identification of the problem is recognised (Caramani, 2008).
Policy Formulation	Involves the definition, discussion, acceptance or rejection of feasible actions for coping with issues of policies. Policy formulation deals with the depth of the alternatives of action, and is therefore defined as the implication of policy objectives and the selection of the most appropriate policy instruments (Caramani, 2008).

Table 1 (con't)

Policy-cycle stages	Description
Policy Adoption	Involves some official individual or authority to adopt, modify, or reject the preferred policy alternate (Anderson, 2010).
Policy Implementation	Is also referred to as administration (Anderson, 2010). The stage in which the policy cycle of strategies and responsibilities for placing solutions that result in effects (Jennings et al., 2009).
Policy Evaluation	Is a process of monitoring results and effects of policy implementation (Jennings et al., 2009).

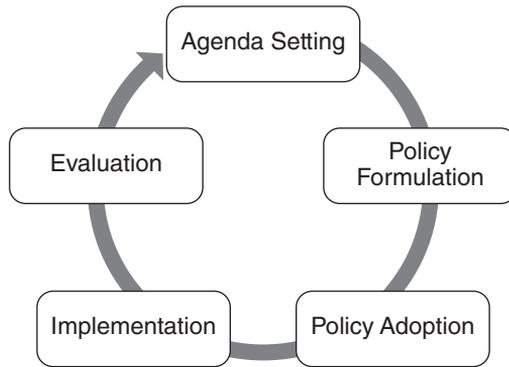


Figure 1. Unidirectional policy-cycle approach

In Malaysia, the stages that come under the constitution of the state and local levels depend heavily on the nature of the policy. The agenda setting and policy formulation for the federal domains of authority such as economic development, health, education and security begins at the central government. These policies will be subsequently adopted at the state level, and implemented and evaluated at the local authority level. In the state list of authority, the policy cycle is likely to begin at the state level and continue at the local level.

The limitations of the policy cycle have not been widely discussed (Volkery & Ribeiro, 2009). The process of the cycle makes assumptions about the policymaker's sufficiency of knowledge in relation to the problem area, or resources at stake. This allows them to undertake the process of developing contingencies and feasible courses of action. In reality, the process of policymaking is haphazard, coined in parallel with the policymakers' political milieu. Bridgman & Davis (2003) claimed that no policy model can claim universal application since every policy process is grounded by the country's institutional system. The stages often take place in parallel, overlap each other, are truncated or are left out altogether (Volkery & Ribeiro, 2009). Often, gaps within the policy present themselves at a later stage of the cycle due to these shortcomings.

Research Methods

Study area: Semporna, Sabah

Rural settings can be measured by the sparseness of population, isolation from the state's largest cities and homogeneity of population (Morehouse, MacBeath & Leask, 1984), or a countryside setting (Lane, 1994). In Malaysia, the Statistics Department of Malaysia and the Federal Department of Town and Country Planning define a rural destination as having a population of less than 10,000 people. Such areas include farming and natural features within the same proximity as its residents regardless of whether they live in clusters, are scattered, or are parallel to one another (Ministry of Rural and Regional Development, 2010).

Semporna is a local district within the Tawau division, in the state of Sabah, with three legislative assemblies within the districts, namely Sulabayan, Senalang and Bugaya. The local district supports the greatest diversity of marine species ever recorded in Malaysia (Montagne, Naim, Tourrand, Pierson, & Menier, 2013; Teh, Teh, & Jolis, 2018). The size of the area is 1,145 square kilometres and comprises 49 islands and two marine parks, Tun Sakaran Marine Park and Sipadan Island Park (Sabah Parks, 2010). The Sabah Economic Development and Investment Authority (SEDIA) (SEDIA, 2013) targets an increase of tourism receipts in Semporna to Gross National Income (GNI) of RM565 million, creating 2,269 jobs. Semporna's coastal town is used by tourists as a gateway to its 49 islands (Kleinen & Osseweijer, 2010) including, Sipadan, Mabul, Bohey Dulang and Sibuan (Hutton, 2001).

Due to its rich biodiversity, Semporna is deemed to be one of the top dive spots in the world. Prior to 2009, tourists visiting Semporna consisted primarily of highly experienced divers. However, in recent years, the area has seen an emergence of a younger and less experienced dive market (Daldeniz & Hampton, 2013). The operators who manage businesses in the area are predominantly not of Semporna origin. These operators leverage tourism opportunities (Daldeniz & Hampton, 2013) and may be less concerned about the long-term future of the island, but more interested in short-term and quick cash turnover (Musa, 2003). Evidently, the corals surrounding Semporna has decreased (Prabhakaran, Nair, & Ramachandran, 2016) and may continue to decline in the future (Zhang, Chung, & Qiu, 2016).

Illegal human migration and challenging socio-economic factors contribute to the complexity of Semporna's management. In 2010, the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2010) estimated that immigrants numbered at approximately 24,000. These immigrants are mostly of Filipino descent and are called *Bajau Laut*, Sea Bajau or Pala'u. They reside in Semporna due to the ongoing political unrest in the Philippines. The Pala'u are categorised as "stateless people" rather than illegal immigrants or political refugees, without any official citizenship and status (Ali,

2010). This community has lived in Sabah from before the formation of Malaysia over 50 years ago. The state government however, denies them citizenship as they do not possess valid documentation (Yunus, 2013).

According to SEDIA, the main policies that govern rural tourism in Semporna, Sabah include, but are not limited to: (i) The Rural Tourism Master Plan, (ii) The National Ecotourism Plan and the (iii) Sabah Tourism Master Plan. SEDIA (2013) has highlighted four projects related to tourism development in Semporna, conducted through the Entry Point Projects (EPP) where EPP 1 is the Semporna Resort. The key objectives of EPP 1 emphasise on upgrading and enhancing the quality of tourism through better infrastructure and to provide job opportunities for locals. EPP 2 is called the Mount Corner Tourism Hub focusing on a new satellite town facilitating accommodation of larger groups of tourists, creating business and job opportunities, and increasing tourist spending. EPP 3 is the Sipadan Mangrove Resort centred on increasing tourist spending and job opportunities. Lastly, EPP 4, Alorie Lepa-Lepa is a resort located on Mabul Island that targets to double tourist arrivals by 2020 and create more job opportunities in the process. Investigations indicate that most of the policies incorporating both active and passive actions to favour tourism do not have indicators to ensure their success.

Methodology and Emerging Themes

In the interest of ANT, the respondents chosen for this study were based on the matrix (Table 2) of administrative jurisdiction by government tiers and by pillars of sustainable development. A policy Delphi technique was used to elicit data from the policymakers. The study involved three individuals from the federal (F), four from the state (S) and three from the local (L) authorities representing the areas of social, economy and environment. Each agency was labelled according to their representation on the 3-tier government system, numbered in no particular order.

The sampling technique that was adopted for the governmental agencies was purposive, non-probability sampling where academicians, ministries and their agents were identified. This mode of sampling was selected as it enables the researcher to specify a particular purpose through the selection of experienced individuals based on the characteristics of the sample member (Zikmund, Carr, & Griffin, 2012). This form of sampling is characterised by the use of judgment and deliberate effort to include presumably typical groups in a sample (Topp, Barker, & Degenhardt, 2004). Since expert opinion is sought, it does not need to represent the general population (Skulmoski, Hartman, & Krahn, 2007). Instead, it demands that the researcher thinks critically about the parameters of the population to be studied and carefully choose the sample on this basis (Silverman, 2005).

Table 2. Respondent matrix

	Federal (F)	State (S)	Local (L)
Social, Economy, Environment	F1: Ministry of Education (MOE)	S1: Ministry of Tourism, Culture & Environment, Sabah	L1: Sabah Parks, Semporna
	F2: Tourism Malaysia (TM)	S2: SEDIA Sabah S3: Sabah Tourism Board	L2: District Office of Semporna
	F3: Ministry of New and Renewable Energy Malaysia	S4: Environmental Protection Department, Sabah	L3: Fisheries Department, Sabah

There are two rounds in the Delphi technique, which the researcher must follow to extract data from the policymakers and academicians. The procedure of trustworthiness include the triangulation of responses from the respondents collected using the Delphi technique. The credibility of the data is done by cross-checking the verbatim discussion with the respondents to verify if the research findings represent the plausible information drawn from the participants’ original data and is a correct interpretation of the participants’ original views. The researcher achieves data saturation normatively, and stops asking questions within a particular theme when nothing new is generated. This approach of theoretical completeness allows the saturation of data to be achieved when the themes and problems within the pool of responses start to repeat.

The use of peer review is to give researchers opportunities to check and test their findings as they unfold (Kember & Goh, 1993). This means that the reliability of findings is amplified when the peer review converges with results that appear to be consistent with the data collected. For the purpose of this research, peer reviews were conducted with research team members as they were well-informed about the study site.

Thematic analysis was used and three distinct findings emerged. Each emergent finding represented the main components of sustainable tourism that comprises social, economy and environment. The researcher screened through various aspects of the input from both stages. Once that was concluded, codes were assigned to words or sentences that have similar meanings or fall within the similar category of themes. The construction, de-construction and re-construction of themes were repeated several times before the set of themes was finalised. The analysis of data from various actors and phases underwent the construct-deconstruct-reconstruct process for the themes to emerge from the data. This is to ensure that any emergent themes that surfaced along the way were carefully constructed and analysed.

Subsequently, the limitations of the unidirectional policy cycle were discovered through the identification and interpretation of the emergent shortcomings. The source of the emergent shortcomings was reflected based on the policymakers interpretation in locating the gaps within the policy cycle. These findings are in no distinct order, however, they do represent each tier of the government system.

Results

Emerging Theme 1: Social Participation

The first emergent shortcoming from on-site investigations indicates that there is a lack of participation amongst the local communities in tourism-related activities. This question was probed in questions to the policymakers.

The federal government representative (F3) articulated this in saying that:

“We are not supposed to please everyone, but generally we get consensus and participation so that it benefits them and they know what is in for them. (We) have to benefit the outsider, but (we) must benefit the local community.”

The state government representative (S4) reacted differently on this statement indicating:

“This statement is not true, because the government is open to whoever who wants to be involved.”

As an alternative perspective, the local government representative (L1) opined:

“The authority will assume this community does not have the capacity to be involved. If you do not involve them, the community will not support you.... where do you put religion? It is a factor. Some of the community, they are a bit conservative.”

The first emergent gap from the investigation revealed that the federal and state governments are aware that the policies are available for local participation, indicating that the policy does not hinder anyone from participating in tourism related activities. A similar response from the local government, reflects awareness of the possibility of religion contributing to the lack of the local participation in tourism related business. Adding further, tourists are perceived to bring in negative influences to the community, indicating hostile opinions about tourism. The use of alcohol and not dressing appropriately were some of the negative connotations used.

Table 3 presents the feedback of policymakers in identifying the source of shortcomings within the policy cycle. A majority of the respondents identified that the gap occurred in the agenda-setting phase. They are of the opinion that agenda setting is the source of the gap due to the inability of policymakers to include the sensitivity of religion in policies that encourage local participation in tourism-related activities. Interestingly, further probing indicated that some policymakers were unfamiliar with the stages and definitions of the policy cycle. Instead, they made estimates based on the explanation provided to them during the interview. Arguably, these findings can be challenged based on literature definitions.

Table 3. Policymakers’ responses in identifying the source of gap

Representation	Policy Cycle				
	Agenda Setting	Formulation	Adoption	Implementation	Evaluation
Federal	2	/	/	/	/
State	2	/	/	2	/
Local	3	/	/	/	/
Total	7	0	0	2	0

Unidirectional policy cycle and social participation

Addressing the unidirectional policy cycle, policymakers at the federal and state level were clear on the inclusion of policies that encouraged local participation into the tourism industry. Therefore, the stages between agenda setting to policy adoption were deemed to be own par amongst federal and state authorities. The problem arises at the implementation stage, as the local authorities are aware of the limitation of implementing this policy to communities who are not entirely receptive towards the tourism industry. As a result, policies that are evaluated at the local level at the end of this cycle will yield poor local participation, prompting the need for policymakers to review the policies at the start of the new cycle. This sequential method of the policy cycle is deemed to be lengthy, as the entire cycle needs to be in completed before any changes to the policies are made.

Table 3 shows that the policymakers have identified agenda setting as the source of the social participation gap. However, the definition of stages in Table 1 indicates that the participation gap has occurred in the formulation stage rather than agenda setting. The main agenda of policymakers to encourage local participation has been addressed by identifying their lack of participation in the tourism sphere. However, the lack of local participation in tourism-related activities could be a result of many other reasons such as the shortage of human resource management and development. While agenda setting has addressed the broad issue of local participation, it is through

policy adoption that policymakers can modify the policy by including feasible actions such as adding terms on code of conduct, dress code and the consumption of alcohol in public places in order to address this particular policy shortcoming.

Figure 2 shows a possible backtracking of the unidirectional policy cycle from the implementation stage to the policy adoption stage once the gap is identified. This backtracking allows timely rectification in the details of the policy, allowing policymakers to include policies that would not only encourage local participation into tourism but also mitigate possible cultural hindrances that might occur.

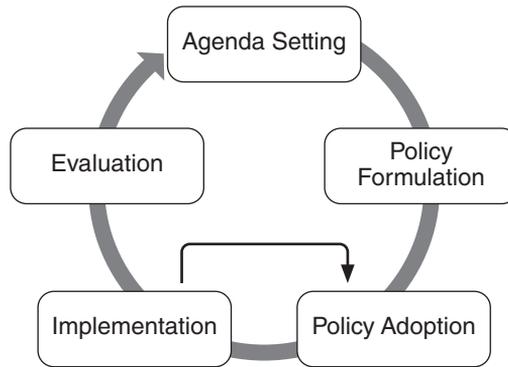


Figure 2. Unidirectional policy cycle backtracking from implementation stage to formulation stage

Emerging Theme 2: Safety and Security Concerns

The other emerging gap identified was the issue of safety and security. This has been a major concern for policymakers, especially when the District Officer of Semporna, Abdul Mohamed Ibnu Abdul Kadir Baba, in his report to the Royal Commission of Inquiry cautioned that Semporna is a dangerous place with an alarmingly large number of immigrants due to its proximity to the Southern Philippines (“Semporna a dangerous district – DO, 2013). Semporna is also deemed as one of the most dangerous backwaters in the world (Koh, 2017).

The federal government representative (F2) opined that security is purely a local concern by stating that security problems can happen anywhere - “*We are not going to change a policy because of one incident...It is a tourism area...it is a dynamic situation*”. He explained that policies should not be changed due to a particular security issue because of the ever-changing landscape of the industry. He further added that policymakers would then have to change policies each time an incident occurs.

The representative from the state government (S1) highlighted that policies regarding safety and security should not be amended, as this would result in a

backlash from tourists, potentially dampening arrival numbers to the state. She further cautioned, “*You can overdo it and people can think that it is not safe...you arrive with a signboard saying that this is a restricted area...scaring the tourist away...you are telling people that it is unsafe... Tourism industry is very sensitive*”.

The local government (L2) respondent stated, “*Here, we have Operation Sulu, Operation Sanggar (eliminating) and Operation Tayang (show-off). When we use Operation Tayang, we are showing off our strength, by using reverse psychology*” (authors’ translation).

In addressing safety and security concerns, contradicting views are inevitable due to the fragmentation of opinions and views. Federal and state perspectives reflect their concerns towards economic impact as security and safety issues might negatively affect tourist arrivals. These concerns are driven by the dynamism and sensitivity of the tourism industry. Opposing this notion, the local government has carried out several police and military operations in order to combat the rising safety and security issues troubling Semporna. They believe that reverse psychology can be used to eliminate intruders through the use and display of military weaponry. This approach contradicts the views held by the state and federal governments in addressing safety and security issues in Semporna.

Policymakers have identified that the source of the gap occurs in the agenda setting stage followed by the formulation stage. In this context, this finding is consistent with literature.

Unidirectional policy cycle and safety and security concerns

Table 4 clearly demonstrates that the opinions of the 3-tier government are divergent. In practice, directives concerning safety and security in Semporna are directly received from the federal government, through the Ministry of Home Affairs, Malaysia. Having said that, the fragmentation of agencies and convergent views become further accentuated as policies concerning safety and security in tourism contrast vastly between intergovernmental tiers and intergovernmental agencies.

Table 4. Policymakers’ responses in identifying the source of gap

Representation	Policy Cycle				
	Agenda Setting	Formulation	Adoption	Implementation	Evaluation
Federal	1	1	/	/	1
State	2	1	/	1	/
Local	2	1	/	/	/
Total	5	3	0	1	1

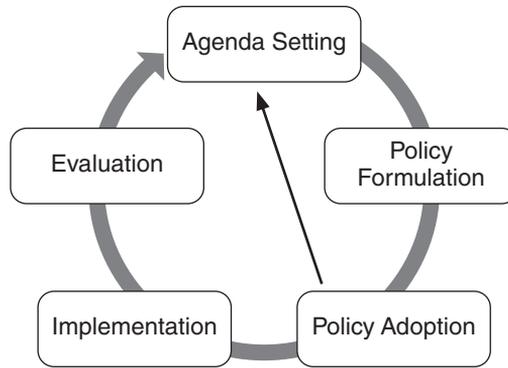


Figure 3. Unidirectional policy cycle backtracking from policy adoption stage to agenda setting stage

To reconcile contrasting opinions, an intercept in the policy cycle can take place (Figure 3) at the policy adoption stage which corresponds with the agenda setting stage at the district level. At the agenda setting stage, policymakers from the 3-tier government and agencies are able to re-align their policies to reflect on-site security and safety complexities. This would allow relevant agencies at different tiers of the government to become synchronised in their objectives.

Emerging Theme 3: Land Title Issues

The final important gap that emerged from the data was the issue of land titles. The designation and ownership of land by indigenous communities was seen as a restriction to tourism development in two particular aspects.

Firstly, the local community has claimed customary rights on sporadic locations around Semporna. The locals who claim these ownerships have been residing on these islands since pre-independence, and have resisted relocation in opposition to development. The complications are further amplified with counterfeit land titles, or no proof or evidence indicating ownership.

The second impediment occurred when Sabah Parks attempted to collect conservation fee from tourists entering Tun Sakaran Marine Park. Some of the locals reacted with violence, demanding compensation under the notion of customary rights and ownership of land.

The issue of land title and attendant complications in tourism development was probed within the 3-tier government system. The federal government respondent (F3) admitted that “*We have virtually no say. Only a supportive role.*”

The state government official (S1) shared a crucial information on land title issues indicating their predicament and desire to solve the problem.

“They want a share. It was already settled, last time before we gazetted this place, we had all the consultation. And we have given the head of each village. Suddenly new people come and they agree and come again.. .and it is a never-ending story. When they first did it (policy), they should have put the cap there already. When you set up all the terms. They should have put the time or a cut-off point in the policy.”

The local government is facing similar issues pertaining to land titles. They claim land title complications is the reason they initiated the collection of conservation fees for entry into Tun Sakaran Marine Park. The local government representative (L3) lamented, *“The problem is, who are the real pewaris (customary owners)? We want to develop together with the community, but we can’t identify them without proper documentation.”*

Another local government representative (L1) echoed the same:

“We have one piece of land, and there are 10 to 20 people claiming that that land is theirs. That’s going to be a hassle if we introduce a fee and everyone wants to get a portion... They will come into my office with a parang (machete)!”

According to the Malaysian constitution, the federal government has no jurisdiction on land issues. In this case, the state and local governments voiced similar opinions regarding land title issues in Semporna. These opinions are not divergent, but highlight a flaw in the policy cycle. This flaw is the inflexibility of the system that does not allow rectification as on-site complications require changes to policies to ensure they are functional.

Unidirectional policy cycle and land title issues

The third emergent gap focuses on the problem that occurred at the policy-formulation stage. Policymakers who formulated this policy did not include a specific time frame for the *pewaris* to register themselves with the respective agencies. As a result of this oversight, Sabah Parks had not been able to collect the conservation fee and has been put on hold indefinitely.

Figure 4 illustrates a possible resolution in overcoming emergent gap 3 by including an intercept from the implementation stage to the policy formulation stage. Once amendments to the policy are made, the cycle continues on track, ultimately allowing Sabah Parks to proceed with the collection of the conservation fee.

The responses from policymakers in identifying the origins of the gap within the policy cycle is seen in Table 5. Most respondents were of the opinion that the implementation stage is the source of the emergent gap. The opinion of the majority can be challenged here, as the implementation stage was where the policy suffered a flaw.

Table 5. Policymakers’ responses in identifying the source of the gap

Representation	Policy Cycle				
	Agenda Setting	Formulation	Adoption	Implementation	Evaluation
Federal	1	/	/	/	/
State	/	1	/	3	1
Local	1	/	1	1	/
Total	2	1	1	4	1

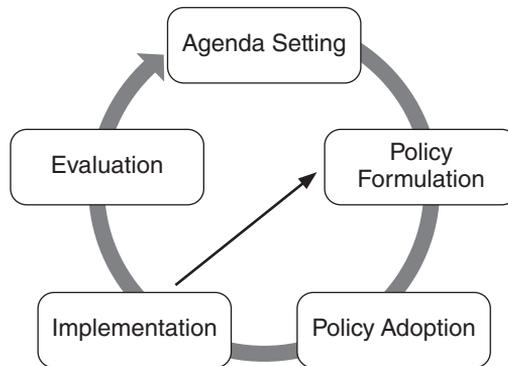


Figure 4. Unidirectional policy cycle backtracking from implementation stage to formulation stage

This occurred as a consequence of not including a cut-off period for claiming land ownership in the policy formulation stage. The findings indicate that only one individual from the state government was able to identify that the gap has occurred in the policy formulation stage. This is consistent with literature which demonstrates that the formulation stage is able to address issues of policies and define the implications of policy objectives.

Findings & Discussion: The Limitations of the Unidirectional Policy Cycle

The nature of the 3-tier governmental system has allowed policymakers to make top-down decisions, entrusting the federal government to formulate general and broader policies. This is followed by the state government's role of enacting broader policies and adopting state-level policies. These policies are subsequently implemented by local-level governments, and are evaluated for further improvement. Policies that are top-down are subjected to a variety of interpretation and implementation measures at lower levels. Further complications arise as a result of institutional fragmentation among government and agencies, on-site knowledge gaps, and conflicting agendas between policymakers. In the on-site case illustrated, the shortcomings in the policy cycle inhibit the effectiveness of the intended policy. The first two shortcomings exemplify institutional fragmentation between federal and state governments, further accentuated by conflicting agendas between policymakers. The third shortcoming projects problems of a top-down instructional policy coupled with on-site knowledge gaps.

While the policy cycle ensures a sequence of discrete stages and phases, the limitations of the policy cycle lies in its ability to retract and rectify when required. Instead, the policy cycle only enables the evaluation of the policy at the last stage of the cycle. As a consequence, policymakers are unable to incorporate changes or gaps in the mid-stages of the cycle, but only at the end after the entire cycle is complete.

The Analytical Network Policy Process

Based on the study findings, tourism policies should be subjected to modifications due to changing circumstances. In addressing the limitation(s) of the conventional unidirectional policy cycle, the assessment of primary data implies that amendments to the policy should be available at the point where the gap is identified. In the analytical policy process, Figure 5 elucidates a network that enables policymakers to rectify policies and retract to the stage that is required. Consequently, the arrows in the policymaking process are multidirectional, indicating that the policymaker does not have to wait for the policy to run its full course before making changes. This provides the policymaker the ability to reverse, amend, and backtrack at any stage that requires rectification, ensuring that the policy meets its objectives and is fully functional.

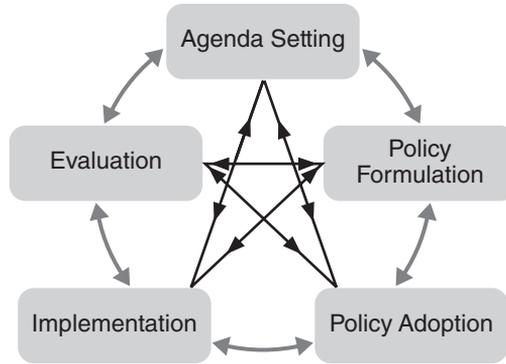


Figure 5. Analytical network policy process

Practical Implications

Table 6 summarises and compares the three emergent findings through the use of the unidirectional policy cycle and analytical network policy process. Policymakers should also be aware that the policy still has to undergo each stage of the policy cycle. The proposed modification will assist policymakers in making changes to suit the changing environment of the tourism landscape in moving towards sustainable practices that are suitable for the ecosystem of Semporna, Sabah. On a macro-level, this practice can be of value to all policies, regardless of their function within the tourism industry.

Table 6. Existing vs proposed policy cycle

	Existing	Proposed	Benefits gained
Scenario 1: Social Participation	Gap occurred at the implementation stage. The existing cycle requires the completion of the full cycle before amendments can take place.	Backtracking to the policy adoption stage to modify existing policy to accommodate on-site complexities.	The proposed backtrack of the policy cycle allows policymakers to cater towards the needs of the locality of Semporna. Through the modification at the policy adoption stage, policymakers can make amendments that will encourage local participation in tourism-related activities.

Table 6 (cont)

	Existing	Proposed	Benefits gained
Scenario 2: Safety and Security	<p>The safety and security gap occurred at the adoption stage. Institutional fragmentation occurred within agencies and within the 3 tiers of the government.</p>	<p>There was a need to synchronise the agenda of safety and security in Semporna amongst agencies and the 3 tiers of the government.</p>	<p>Safety and security policies require the inclusiveness of relevant agencies from all levels of government. Backtracking of the policy cycle enables policymakers to synchronise their policy agendas in order to address on-site safety and security issues.</p>
Scenario 3: Land Ownership	<p>Policymakers highlighted that the issue of land ownership in Semporna has not been resolved. This is because the end date for owners to declare their ownership was not included in the policy.</p>	<p>Policymakers will need to re-formulate the policy that was intended to address land ownership issues by including an end date for owners to declare their rights to the land.</p>	<p>Sabah Parks is unable to collect conservation fees from visitors entering Tun Sakaran Marine Park due to this issue. If this issue prolongs, anthropogenic effects will cause further environmental degradation. The proposed policy amendments include the end-date for owners to declare their rights to the land, hence paving the way for Sabah Parks to collect the conservation fees from Tun Sakan Marine Park.</p>

Conclusion: The Analytical Policy Process and Sustainable Tourism

This study examined the unidirectional policy making process in sustainable tourism policies in the context of a multidisciplinary, multi-agency and multi-levelled government structure in Malaysia. It studied the sustainable tourism

policies that are functionable to develop principles, implement strategies and action plans for economic, socio-cultural and environmental ecosystems of the tourist destination.

The study was conducted in a rural tourism destination, Semporna, Sabah, Malaysia that is diverse with aquamarine flora and fauna habitation, coupled with the complexity of a multi-level government structure and overlapping jurisdictions. Findings demonstrate that existing policies have several issues, namely i) diverging policies that are formulated by different agencies at multiple levels of the government, ii) gaps of knowledge in tourism-related issues between policymakers and end users, iii) the rigidity of the unilateral policy process that does not allow changes to be made when the need arises. The limitation of this study includes the participation levels of the selected respondents. Policymakers are often preoccupied with their duties, hence securing time and commitment was often a challenge. This was further exacerbated when more than one meeting was required to facilitate the Delphi process. As a result, several policymakers opted out in the subsequent rounds. Other challenges include the outreach to rural localities as the study site was only accessible by a 4-hour road and boat ride.

The sustainability of tourism-related policies depends on the constant analysis of policies due to the dynamism it demands. While the existing policy process ensures that all crucial steps in the sequence are addressed, policies tend to end up being obsolete if the gaps within the policies are not rectified. The future and sustainability of the destination is deeply rooted in the long-term use and management of human, natural and man-made resources which demands consistent reviews. Thus, the adaptation of the analytical network policy process in policymaking is proposed as a means to provide a platform towards sustainable tourism.

The lessons for policymakers include the flexibility to make changes to policies as a result of uniqueness of the tourism destination and the volatility of the tourism industry to external factors. While each destination is unique and requires different functional policies, policymakers can fine-tune federal and state level policies with certain alterations prior to their adaptation at the local level. The importance of this approach is paramount to ensure that the objectives of sustainable tourism policies are met. These actions are particularly crucial in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, whereby the model allows an agile and dynamic approach in closing the gaps within the policy system in a timely manner. These implications allow actions to be taken more efficiently, hence benefiting the economic and social well-being of the public.

This study would be well complemented by further empirical studies examining the impact of a unidirectional policy process in a tourism setting. The relevance of these actions should also prioritise Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as the country's future in moving into the endemic stage of COVID-19. These studies are crucial in order to ensure for a better and sustainable future.

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