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Hearing the authentic voice of stakeholders? Implications for governance of tourism strategy-making

Abstract: Exploring tourism strategy-making in the light of complexity theory this research examines the interactions that take place between stakeholders as strategy is developed and codified. It focuses on York, a significant UK tourist destination. Taking a strategy-as-narrative approach it seeks to identify the plurality of stakeholder voices as the embodiment of the *authentic voice* of strategy.

Key research themes are identified concerning how discourses, as manifestations of socially embedded networks of power, surface in narrative within strategy-making; what power relations govern which come to the fore and which are silenced. A heuristic device explains the power relations at work as the interplay of *performative* and *attributed* power.

The study points to the need for further work to understand how all stakeholders might be enabled to contribute equally to strategy-making, addressing the power differentials between actors through the allocation of appropriate resources.

Keywords: Strategy; authenticity; power; stakeholders; narrative.

Introduction

This research starts from an understanding of tourism strategy-making as a messy, emergent and essentially political process, critically concerned with communication and collaboration between multiple stakeholders (Stevenson, Airey, & Miller, 2008). Examining strategy-making from the viewpoint of the stakeholders the study considers how an *authentic* stakeholder voice might emerge from strategy-making and the implications that such a search for *authenticity* might have for the governance of strategy-making. Taking a narrative-as-strategy approach the various stakeholder discourses in play in strategy-making are examined and key research

themes are identified concerning why particular narratives come to the fore in strategy-making.

There is evidence in the (relatively sparse (Pforr, 2005)) literature on tourism strategy-making as a public policy activity that the predominant approaches come from a rational paradigm (Stevenson et al., 2008). These typically take spatial and economic orientated approaches (Hall, 2000) focussing on aspects of tourism planning that exhibit order, linearity and equilibrium (Russell & Faulkner, 1998). The problem with such "black box" approaches where organisational inputs are unproblematically converted into outputs (Treuren & Lane, 2003) is that they do not adequately deal with the complexity at work in policy-making "on the ground" (Farrell & Twining-Ward, 2003), failing to understand the social processes at work and leading to gaps in knowledge (Russell & Faulkner, 1998). This paper will argue that theory is needed that reflects a characterisation of tourism strategy-making as 'a messy and complex arena' (Tyler & Dinan, 2001a, p. 219), buffeted by the impacts of global social, political and organisational change (Elliot, 1997; Thomas & Thomas, 1998; Jeffries, 2001; Maitland, 2006), with a 'multitude of voices trying to make themselves heard' (Tyler & Dinan, 2001b, p. 475) through a panoply of unpredictable and evolving relationships.

"Institutional" approaches to public policy-making found in the literature are helpful in as much as they show how the distribution of power within political systems is affected by the formal rules, conventions and procedures that operate within public institutions (John, 2012; Stevenson et al, 2008) and demonstrate the impact of this on the various components of the tourism management system (Elliott, 1997; Dredge & Jenkins, 2003; Tyler & Dinan, 2001a; Tyler & Dinan, 2001b). However, whilst they demonstrate that policy emerges from a political rather than a rational process (Veal, 2002), their focus on the effects of socially constructed norms fails to take adequate account of the dynamic effect of the power of particular interest groups (John, 2012) and, as a result, they are not fully able to explain why policies change.

The complexities arising from those global political, economic and social forces that bear down on tourism strategy-making, notably the demand for greater local control over the development process (Hall, 2000; Keogh,1990; Ritchie, 1993; Getz, 1983),

have led scholars to locate tourism policy development within broader fields (Getz, 1986; Laws & Le Pelley, 2000) especially global change science (Farrell & Twining-Ward, 2003; Kerr, Barron & Wood, 2001) stakeholder, and network theories (Sheehan & Ritchie, 2005; Jamal & Getz, 1995; Schianetz et al., 2007; Arnaboldi & Spiller, 2011; Bramwell & Sharman, 1999). These approaches reflect 'the plurality of organisational interest groups' (Treuren & Lane, 2003, p. 4) and can be seen as 'powerful organising perspectives' (Dredge, 2006, p. 271) in understanding relational conceptions of policy-making (Tyler & Dinan, 2001b, p. 461; Franch, Martini & Buffa, 2010). Yet the criticism remains that they still offer insufficient explanation of how and why relationships form and change (John, 2012).

This criticism is to some extent anticipated by a number of scholars who discount the possibility that there is a single framework of understanding that can explain such relationships but argue instead for "thick description" (Geertz, 1973), drawing on broader theories of social, political and economic change (Dredge & Jenkins, 2003), and linking networks to their social context (Bramwell & Meyer, 2007) to show that how actors respond to policies depends on networks of relations and is bounded by social conventions, values and power relations (Bramwell, 2006).

The complexity of tourism systems has led to them being increasingly considered as complex adaptive systems (Baggio & Sainaghi, 2010), collections of individual actors who have the freedom to act in ways that are not always predictable and whose actions are interconnected so that one individual's actions change the context for other actors. Thus the behaviour of the system 'emerges from the interaction among the agents' (Plsek, 2003, p. 2) as "generative relationships" are created which produce valuable, new and unpredictable capabilities that are not inherent in any of the parts acting alone (Lane & Maxfield, 1996). Strategy-making seen in this way becomes a process of structuring and interpreting relationships according to their "generative potential". Whereas, in the classical view, strategy provides top-down control, in the complex system order, innovation, and progress emerge naturally from the interactions within it (Plsek & Greenhalgh, 2001) with a few, flexible, simple rules or "minimum specifications"' (Plsek & Wilson, 2001) needed to point the way, give permissions, create boundaries.

Governance of strategy-making viewed thus is concerned with creating the minimal structures necessary to cope with the absence of certainty and absolutes and to facilitate multiple perspectives (Darwin, Johnson, & Mcauley, 2002), so that "strategic improvisation" (Pina e Cunha & Vieira da Cunha, 2006), self-organized solutions (Anderson, 1999, p. 228), learning, and the adoption of innovative ideas can emerge.

Strategy as narrative

How are governance processes defined in this way to be observed? This paper takes a postmodern standpoint where no single, unitary discourse can be imposed to define "truth"; rather, truth is relative to the socially derived discourses that each of us deploy. The focus of study becomes the "mindset" of the stakeholders, their multiple understandings of the nature of the reality that confronts them, permeated by the emotional material that shapes the paradigm within which they live (Darwin et al., 2002).

This plurality of truth is reflected in *narrative therapy* (Barry, 1997) which rejects expert-imposed solutions in favour of careful reading, acknowledgement and reflection of client stories, opening up the potential to tell alternative stories which counter the dominant discourses (Barry, 1997). Taking this *strategy-as-story* perspective (Barry & Elmes, 1997), strategists make sense of their actions and interactions with others through a process of narrating everyday life: 'stories are a way in which actors impose or perceive patterns in their "lived experience"' (Beech & Johnson, 2005, p. 33). Designed to produce effective action rather than alignment with some "factual" reality (Ford, 1999), these "conversational realities" create their own specific "conditions of possibility" (Knights & Morgan, 1991).

This study pays close attention to the narratives that constitute the strategy-making process. It is argued that these narratives, voicing experiences unmediated by any unitary view of truth, will give expression to the *authentic voice* of stakeholders within tourism strategy-making. Yet how is *authenticity* to be understood amongst the multiple, competing realities of the strategy-making process?

Authentic Voice

Authenticity is an important concept in the tourism literature. Often seen as a "holy grail" for tourists (Heitmann, 2011) it appears to function in the "real world" as a description of the tourist experience (Bellhassen & Caton, 2006; Chhabra, 2010; Bobot, 2012; Mantecon & Huete, 2007; Chhabra, 2012; Mkono, 2012). At the same time it is contested as a term, even argued to have become too "unstable" for meaningful use (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006). Which of its various interpretations will be of use to this study? Structural approaches to *authenticity,* such as MacCannell (1973), which imply that authenticity means the same to everyone, like a standard or quality mark, do not serve, leaving no room for the interplay of multiple realities within strategy-making argued for here. Constructivist approaches which characterise authenticity as a socially constructed interpretation of the genuineness of observable things (Cohen,1988), giving primacy to the perception of the observer (Taylor, 2000) and rendering authenticity negotiable, dependent on context (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006) are more promising. Yet it is from postmodern thought that this study derives its conception of *authenticity*. Here, where the copy becomes the original or even better than the original and simulation becomes more real than the "really real" (Tucker, 2002), what is comes with its own significance and everything experienced is real and authentic in itself, a perpetual present, perpetual simulation (Bruner, 1994).

In postmodern thought, the very attempt to define *authenticity* implies an objectivity that is foreign to the term (Golomb, 1995). Rather, authenticity is discerned in relations of existence and freedom where I attend to the passionate search for my goal: 'the thing is to find a truth which is true for me, to find the idea for which I can live and die' (Kierkegaard, 1959, p. 44).   Authentic life has less to do with a specific concrete content, a "what", than with following a particular path, a "how", in 'having a true and lucid consciousness of the situation, in assuming the responsibilities and risks that it involves' (Sartre, 1965, p. 90). It is about action: 'Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself' (Sartre, 1946) and that action can only be meaningful in the context of interaction within society (Golomb, 1995).

What utility, then, does the concept of authenticity, contested as it is, have for the examination of tourism strategy-making? The answer is likely to be found in the shift

in the tourist literature away from structuralist approaches towards negotiation of meaning, and away from objectification towards an existential perspective where it is neither object nor the self that can be considered authentic but where the emphasis is placed on inter-subjective reflection, action and inter-action. It will be the quality of these that determine the authenticity of the strategy-making process. Tourism strategy will be authentic, understood in this way, to the extent to which it is shaped by the many voices present in the collective struggle for sense of place, reflects multiple perspectives, including those that counter the dominant discourse, and produces "truths" that stakeholders are individually and collectively willing to take up and to act upon.

What governs why some narratives come to the fore?

This research then seeks the *authentic voice* of stakeholders as the expression of multiple competing realities, struggling to create meaning as they interact within the processes of strategy-making through narrative. It considers the impact of governance on *authentic* voice within strategy-making by addressing how narratives function as one of the deep power structures through which leadership is dispersed (Parry & Hansen, 2007) and how power operates within the social practices of the stakeholders to make some voices come to the fore whilst others are silenced (Dawson, 2003; Vickers, 2008; Darwin et al., 2002).

To pursue this aim it must be understood that narratives are situated not just in particular interactions but also in social, cultural and institutional discourses which shape their meaning and which are the key to interpreting them (Riessman, 1993). Competing narratives emerge from the *ideologies* (Weik, 1995) that reflect the beliefs, interests and preferences for certain outcomes of the social groups that give rise to them. In the work of Foucault, cultures are constructed out of numerous, competing discourses which play a key role in the social construction of reality, by shaping our perceptions of the world, pulling together chains of associations that produce meaningful understanding, and then organising the way we behave towards other people. In this way they constitute and generate knowledge and "truth" (Foucault, 1970). Discourses are intimately involved with socially embedded networks of power. Since certain types of discourse enable specific types of individuals to "speak the truth," that is to be believed when speaking on specific

subjects, discourses give these individuals degrees of social, cultural, and political power.

Discourse is regulated by society, 'controlled, selected, organised and redistributed' (Foucault, 1971, p. 8) as "discourse coalitions", groups of actors who share a social construct (Hajer, 1993), exercise their power in order to impose their views of reality on others. The task then is to give insight into how "reality" is constructed through the way discourse rules in or out certain ways of thinking, talking or speaking about a topic (Grant & Hardy, 2004; Barad, 2003), enabling certain ways of acting whilst restricting others (Palli, Vaara, & Sorsa, 2009) and thus determining what future may come into being (Austin, 1962).

Discourse analysis approaches will be needed to explore how particular discursive practices, events and narratives are shaped by 'relations of power and struggles over power' (Fairclough, 2010, p. 94).   Narrative approaches will address why a story was told in a particular way, what linguistic and cultural resources it draws upon, how it persuades a listener of authenticity (Riessman, 1993), and what power it conveys within the process. Key questions will concern the timing and content of the narrative as well as the position and power of the narrator (Kerttula & Takala, 2012). It will be essential to understand the "qualitative power" at the disposal of the antagonists (Raven & Kruglanski, 1970), why some actors are more effective than others in getting others to accept their ideas (Cross & Parker, 2004).

The setting

The approach taken is a case study of tourism strategy-making in the city of York undertaken between July 2012, when the City Council decided to create a new vision for tourism, and January 2014, when the new strategy was launched. York was selected as a case study for this research because of the extensive access to the strategy-making process that was available to me in my role as the Council's chief officer responsible for tourism. The study is ethnographic, being developed from the perspective of the views of stakeholders in the strategy-making process as it unfolded and the unique perspective afforded to me as a participant observer (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2011).

York is an appropriate site for such a case study since it has an extensive history of involvement in tourism planning dating back to the 1970s. A major city visitor destination, in 2012 it received an estimated 7 million visitors who spent £606 million, making tourism York's biggest economic sector and supporting around 20,200 jobs (Visit York, 2014). The city has its own destination management organisation, Visit York.

In 2012 the Council's ambition was to create a new tourism strategy that would help deliver on its over-arching economic vision to become a top ten English city economy (City of York Council, 2011). The Council initiated the strategy-making, establishing a steering group reporting to the Council's cabinet member. This was jointly led by myself and the Chair of Visit York and also included the Chief Executive of Visit York and the Council's Project Officer.

The study draws upon and examines the formal elements of the strategy-making process, including the recorded output of consultation questionnaires and workshops, decision-making meetings, steering group meetings, and the strategy documentation itself, as well as the informal processes of interaction between stakeholders that took place in the various forums that constituted the strategy-making process.

Study methods

The research strategy reflects the contextualisation of the governance of tourism strategy within complexity theory which holds that changes of behaviour in organisational systems too tiny to detect or measure lead the system to completely different states of behaviour meaning that, 'for all practical purposes, the links between cause and effect are lost in the detail of what happens' (Stacey, 2003, p. 230). Consequently the focus is placed on the relationships and networks by which complex systems are defined (Blackman, 2001), the processes of human interaction and communication (Stacey, 2003) that lead to the self-organisation and emergence that characterise complex human systems (Shaw, 2002, p. 20).

As researcher I am working within a constructivist paradigm, adopting a relativist ontology where there are multiple realities, a subjectivist epistemology where knower

and respondent co-create understandings, and a naturalistic set of methodological procedures (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The research strategy adopted is 'focussed on interpretation and the understanding of meaning' (Pinnegar & Dayes, 2007, p. 5), 'attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3). Critically, it reflects the consequences of the researcher's special position within the milieux and processes under investigation, recognising that as participant I would not find narratives so much as participate in their creation (Riessman, 2008). Thus, whilst abandoning any notion of scientific objectivity and certainly of "distance", it nonetheless seeks value in the privileged position afforded me. In short, as the senior council officer with responsibility for delivering the strategy, I was closely involved in this process; my position is far from neutral. The challenge therefore, is to exploit that position whilst remaining keenly aware of it, reflecting at all times on the potential influence of my professional role on my role as researcher, and constantly interpreting and re-interpreting my observations in the light of the theoretical framework outlined in the literature review.

The task of interpreting and understanding meaning within the study is taken to be one of making particular "readings" of narratives reflecting an understanding that notions of truth or fact are essentially discursive or linguistic constructs: language does not represent reality but rather creates it, whilst all knowledge is 'constructed in and by some discourse' (Johnson & Duberley, 2000, p. 102). Thick description is used for the purpose of 'sorting out the structures of signification', "inscribing" social discourse in order to trace its "curve", 'fixing it into an inspectable form' (Geertz, 1973, p. 9). The focus is not the event of speaking but the "said" of speaking, 'the "thought", "content", "gist" of the speaking' (p. 19). The aim is to study meaning rather than behaviour, to seek understanding rather than causal laws, rejecting mechanistic explanations in favour of interpretative ones (Shankman, 1984). The approach is "microscopic", aiming to draw large conclusions from small, but very densely textured facts (Geertz, 1973).

Collecting the data

The research strategy involves examination of data collected over the 18 month period of strategy-making up to the launch of the new strategy. The first source is

responses received through the local authority's stakeholder consultation processes including web, email, and paper-based responses, written material created during three consultation workshops, and the write-up of consultation meetings held with key stakeholder groups by council officers and officers of Visit York, the city's destination marketing organisation. Consultees include individual residents and visitors, tourism businesses, cultural providers, HE and FE institutions, Council and Visit York officers, other stakeholder groups, such as the Hoteliers Association. The strategy documents produced as a result of these processes, notably the *Interim Strategy* document published immediately after the consultation are included in this source.

The second major source of data is the informal private research notes that I made during consultation meetings, both formal and informal, group and one-to-one, as well as of meetings held by the strategy steering group, both their own internal, private meetings, as well as their meetings with other stakeholders and decision makers. I also made field notes based on reports received from steering group members of consultation meetings that they had attended individually.   All the participants involved in the strategy-making knew that I held the dual roles of manager of the strategy-making process and researcher. They were aware that I was recording their contributions to, and views about, the strategy-making throughout the process and consented to me attributing their views to them, using the appropriate role descriptor for them, where applicable.

A third source of data is provided by 13 semi-structured interviews with stakeholders. Interviewees were chosen whose position as informed insiders, playing an active role in the strategy-making process, made them information-rich. The purpose of the interviews was to clarify and elaborate upon emerging themes and ideas. Whilst these themes guided the interviews they were used flexibly with opportunities taken to explore issues in depth and obtain detailed accounts. The questions posed were designed to allow reflection on the provisional themes without revealing the theme to the interviewee. This allowed me to reflect with the interviewee and provided opportunities for me to revise understandings and to be open to new themes emerging. In this way the process moved between being inductive and open-ended and a more deductive approach to theming ideas.

These 60 minute interviews were recorded and transcribed, enabling thoughts and ideas to develop concerning the discourses that they revealed. By analysing the text manually I was able to produce scripts to map ideas, refine concepts, and identify relationships in the data leading to themes.

The findings were first written up as a script identifying the narratives emerging from the data sources thematically, seeking to examine what content they communicated rather than how they were structured (Riessman, 2008). Attention was given to how narratives might be indicative of discourses functioning socially.   The emerging narratives were examined in the context of the literature review to connect the emerging theory from the narratives to existing theory in the literature, aiming to consider why particular narratives are deployed, what discourses give rise to them, and why some narratives are more successful than others.

Findings

The core characteristic of York's strategy-making, identified in the data, concerns power. From the outset strategy-making was framed as an instrument of power with the Leader of the Council using it to drive the change that he was determined to see: *'My frustration started off with… there didn't seem to be the impetus in trying to change … there was quite a lot of reluctance … so I said, "well, if Visit York can't deliver … the Council will have to do it"'*. The strategy-making that followed can be characterised as a playing out of the power flows facilitated by the competing narratives of the stakeholders as they engaged in the process. To examine these power flows I considered the narrative themes emerging from my initial scripts asking why particular narratives were deployed and what discourses gave rise to them, and how the outcomes that I observed when conflicting discourses collided within the strategy-making could be accounted for.

My initial analysis of the data suggested that power resides in three spheres (see figure 1). First, there is the performative power of the narrative itself, its ability to create a shared rationality, to define the strategic categories in which strategy-making may be talked about and framed. Secondly, there is the attributed power of the actor deploying the narrative, power derived from their position as well as from

their personal attributes and actions. Finally, there is the power of the context, the milieu of the stakeholders in the strategy-making, where narratives will resonate that grow the community of stakeholders and enhance their power and influence.
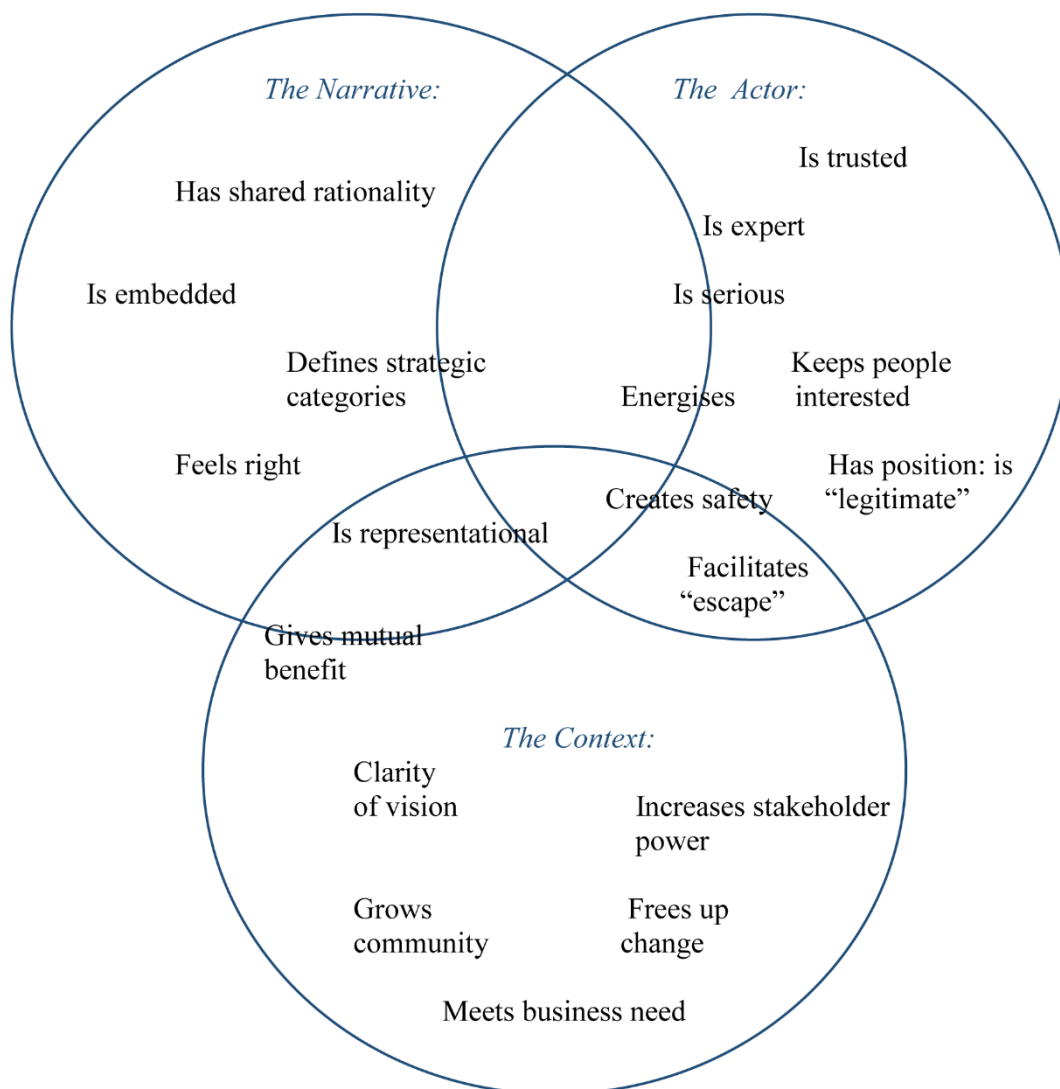
The Narrative:

Has shared rationality

Is embedded

Defines strategic categories

Feels right

Is representational

Gives mutual benefit

The Actor:

Is trusted

Is expert

Is serious

Energises

Keeps people interested

Creates safety

Has position: is "legitimate"

Facilitates "escape"

The Context:

Clarity of vision

Increases stakeholder power

Grows community

Frees up change

Meets business need

Figure 1

Figure 1. Strategy as narrative: power in three spheres

I then placed my observations in the context of the relevant literature concerning power in order to seek a more powerful explanation of what I observed. This suggested that whilst there may, at first sight, appear to be three spheres, the sphere of the narrative and the sphere of the context may more usefully be collapsed together since no narrative can have power on its own, can "sound right" without

reference to a particular context and the stakeholders' reception of it in light of that context. Collapsing these now gives two spheres of power (see figure 2).
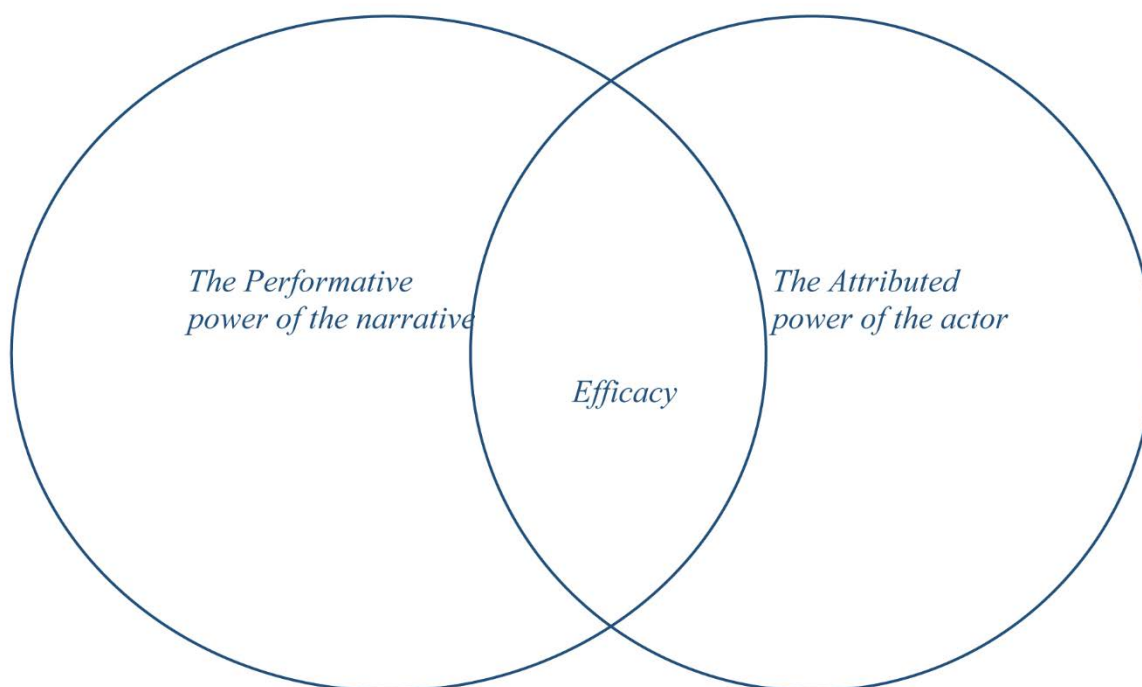

The Performative power of the narrative

The Attributed power of the actor

Efficacy

Figure 2

Figure 2. Strategy as narrative: two spheres of power

Attributed power

This sphere concerns the power of the individual actor. The actor's impact on the strategy-making process is determined not only by the amount of power at the actor's disposal but also by the qualitative nature of that power (Raven & Kruglanski, 1970) and the social influence of the actor (French & Raven, 1968), their ability to bring about a change in the belief, attitude or behaviour of another person (Raven, 1990).

The significance of the power of the actor was repeatedly referred to by stakeholders in the case study. It was often expressed in terms of leadership. As one stakeholder said, '*It's all about leadership … If someone is a leader they will make it happen and people will tend to follow, provided that they articulate their ambitions very clearly and simply and say it over and over and over again … If we have a leader who*

*comes across as being weak, disorganised, or someone who brings no substance, then that's the end of the projec*t.'

Performative power

This sphere takes as its starting point the observation that strategy is a social practice and that narratives as a product of discourse are socially created instruments (Hendry, 2000). Actors cannot simply create a narrative to meet their own needs: any narrative must be placed within a context where it sounds both meaningful and "right" to its audience (Hardy, Palmer, & Phillips, 2000). The visitor attraction manager who argued at a consultation workshop that the central aim of the strategy should be a big, new attraction for York remained alone at his flipchart; the narrative didn't sound "right" to other stakeholders in the context of a city often viewed as a network of moderately sized attractions.

The context of strategy-making, the terrain within which the stakeholders operate and where the narratives of strategy-making play out is critical to the receptivity of stakeholders to a particular narrative and hence to its performative power. As one stakeholder put it, the strategy had to be '*born into the many stakeholders out there'*. Strategy is a community activity where those who accept the narrative are provided with a 'subjective identity that is expanded through participation in its reproduction' (Knights & Morgan, 1991, p. 254); they are transformed into 'subjects' who secure their wellbeing, their sense of purpose and reality, 'by formulating, evaluating and conducting strategy' (Knights & Morgan, 1991, p. 251).

The strategy-making

The next section shows how these two spheres of power interacted to shape York's strategy-making as it emerged in the form of an *Interim Strategy* document. The key characteristics of this document were:

- A strapline: *York – Compelling World City*
- An overarching aim: *A Doubling of the Value of Tourism to the Economy*
- Three core principles: *York is the Brand; Grow the Sector; and A Business Proposition and Perspective*

The power of the economic development discourse

At the outset of the strategy-making I set out, on behalf of the Council, to create a process that would be inclusive of all stakeholder voices in York, be they resident or business, and to create a strategy that authentically represented York. How then, from all these many and various perspectives, was *A doubling of the value of tourism to the economy* selected as the central aim of York's strategy? The seeds were sown from the outset when the strategy group launched the strategy-making process at the Visit York board meeting of July 2012. Here the Leader of the Council set out an economic development discourse stating that the strategy must be about economic impact: '*We need to start from targets that are about "spend," "jobs" and "quality"; we need clear and measurable objectives … underpinned by hard numbers*'. This assertion had immediate performative power; it sounded right to the board; there were nods from the directors around the table. As the Chief Executive of Visit York subsequently observed, '*The fact we had someone saying "tourism is important to the economy" … the directors would have been positive ... nobody argued'.*

Not only did the economic development discourse have performative power, aligning with the discourse of the city's influential Economic Development Partnership as well, of course, as being grounded in prevalent tourism theory, it also carried the "legitimate power" of the Council Leader, who was seen as *'absolutely key'* (the CEO of a heritage organisation) to the strategy-making. The Leader invested the strategy with gravitas and "official" approval, giving stakeholders the confidence to align themselves with it. As the CEO of Visit York observed, from this point on '*nobody argued;'* the pre-eminence of the economic growth discourse was simply accepted as being "right".

Expressed in one of the three key principles: *Grow the Sector*, the economic development discourse functioned as a "performative utterance" (Austin, 1962): not so much describing the future as causing it to come into being; "disciplining the city" (Flyvbjerg, 1998) with respect to the purpose of strategy and what might be included within it. It operated to structure the social reality of strategy-making, by 'elaborating a view of the world in which problems are defined that the discourse can "solve"' (Knights & Morgan, 1991, p. 254), acting as an instrument of power through the

"categorical distinctions" that it created, the 'concepts – categories, relationships and theories through which we understand the world' (Hardy et al., 2000, p. 1,234). In so doing it created the 'specific conditions of possibility ... that … enable certain ways of acting while at the same time restrict[ing] other actions' (Palli & Sorsa, 2009, p. 303).

Following the strategy-making launch an initial consultation phase was undertaken inviting ideas, through multiple channels, from businesses, residents and visitors, about what York should look like in ten years' time. Two stakeholder workshops and an academic conference were also held. At the end of this phase the strategy steering group met to consider the feedback gained. A large body of disparate comments, together with over 60 specific ideas, gained from the workshops, regarding product development, events and festivals, attractions, improving the public realm and so on, was piled on the table before it. The steering group showed little enthusiasm for looking at it. For my part, how was I to deal with this material when the Council Leader had publically stated what kind of strategy I was to produce? For the Chair of Visit York, how was she to square the complexity of this consultation feedback with the simple cogency of the economic development discourse of which her board had apparently been persuaded?

Sensing the steering group's uncertainty, the Council's Project Officer tabled a proposition that the central aim of the strategy should be framed as *Doubling the value of tourism* in York. This immediately created excitement round the table. Drawn from the Project Officer's imagination, rather than from anything learned from the consultation, it was, in his words, '*an exciting, positive target, yet a simple one, just saying it like that; I think that was a real appeal.*' It brought a palpable unity of purpose to the group; it was, as the Chair of Visit York later commented, '*the day we came together … the day when the Council came in and said, "This is what we think should be the target, which is doubling the value." From that point on everything fell into place.*' *Doubling the value* had both performative as well as attributed power. Feedback from residents and visitors, on the other hand, was disparate, fragmented, lacking cogency, unable to fire the imagination or create a shared rationality. It was clear which the Chair of Visit York gave more weight to: '*There are really only two streams of discussion which have taken place ... you're either a strategic thinker or you want to know what date the Food Festival is going to be on.*'

The steering group could now create an initial strategy framework, centring on *Doubling the value of tourism,* and check back with their respective organisations. Within the Council, the Leader affirmed the approach, describing *Doubling the value of tourism* as the '*crux of the whole thing … It has resonance and it's universally accepted. Why would anyone not want to double the value of tourism?*' Visit York officers were less enthused: where was the voice of visitors and businesses? Yet their counter-suggestion that the strategy should be framed as, *it's all about the customers,* or all about *the German coach operators*, (i.e. primarily concerned with marketing strategy), gained little traction with the steering group, ultimately making it only as far as the "small print" in the strategy document. These suggestions did not fit the "reality" created by the economic development discourse, lacking its performative power to create a shared rationality.

The steering group now presented this initial strategy framework back to stakeholders through one-to-one and group discussions with a wide range of stakeholder bodies led by the Chair of Visit York. It found immediate acceptance. *Doubling the value of tourism* fitted with an economic development discourse deeply embedded amongst stakeholders. As the Project Officer commented, '*it appealed to the politicians, to the economic development circle ... to businesses … It seemed to strike a chord very quickly so I think it did work, if you like, as a call to arms to everyone.'* Data produced during the strategy-making process showing that York's tourism industry was already doing very well in spite of the national economic context, leading the Chair of Visit York to pose the question to the strategy group: '*Why would the industry members in York feel they have to bother with a new strategy ... when we are already doing very nicely thank you?'* Yet no-one wanted to allow these data to derail the strategy-making: *Doubling the value of tourism* remained the central aim without any further substantive challenge or even analysis.

A community of stakeholders

As the strategy-making process advanced, through a process of discussion with stakeholders, the lack of dissent was notable. In part this was due to the performative power of the economic development discourse; the architect of this discourse, the Council Leader, commented: '*What surprised me is the ease with*

which people in the city have accepted it as a concept … I thought there would have been far more of a backlash'. At the same time, however, it seems that the *performative power* of the context was also at work. This manifested itself in the way that the less powerful stakeholders wanted to identify themselves with a community of those involved in strategy-making. This is exemplified by a comment from the CEO of a heritage institution that whilst the strategy documentation was, in terms of its content, '*in many ways my nightmare,*' it nonetheless '*did its business, because what it was trying to do was to get everyone at least in the same room. It is saying "you're all here; you can see where you are"'*.

The stakeholders wanted to be at the strategy-making table, concerned that otherwise, as one cultural leader put it, they could be '*missing out on something … [when]something is genuinely happening here.'* The Council's Head of Economic Development spoke for other stakeholders in observing that they were asking themselves, '*isn't it better to be in the game at this stage than being forced to come on board at a later stage when there may not be that opportunity to be part of the core?'* She commented too on their need '*to be seen to collaborate and to say we are working well together.'*

Stakeholders were very aware that, as one business leader commented, '*there is still that element of protecting the interests',* and, according to a leader in the cultural sector, there was '*a bit of worry about … who is holding the power'.* At the same time, however, they were willing to avoid difficult areas because, as the CEO of a cultural organisation commented, '*Nothing is gained by being difficult or pointy',* or again, in the words of a Visit York officer, '*It's very easy to pull these things apart; that's not really what I'm interested in.*' Performative power flowed from strategy-making as community building and the less powerful stakeholders wanted to share in that power. As the CEO of a cultural organisation put it, '*We all thought it was a good idea to have the strategy … so a lot of the tactics were not to get embroiled in the areas that were particularly sticky; by being a bit blank the whole thing moved on'.* Or again, as an hotelier expressed it, it was '*a time when maybe we needed to take the business cap off and put the city cap on*'.

In stressing their desire to collaborate, stakeholders differentiated the current strategy-making, in positive terms, from previous exercises in terms of their desire to collaborate: '*There are some fundamental differences between this and the previous strategy though the objectives haven't changed much ... I think … what it says in one word is "collaboration"*' (a Visit York director).   In so doing they wished to dissociate themselves with an "old guard", '*those who have run the place for a long time and thought they had it all stitched up in a particular way …* ' (a senior manager in HE); blockers, '*who, when I started in this role, around every corner said, "no, we have tried that; we talked about that a few years ago and it won't work"*' (a business leader), and to associate themselves with a new type of person who, they said, had displaced the old guard, typically '*young people who are very enthusiastic'*, people who '*recognise the very different approach needed to work together … who don't have the same baggage ... who want to be part of the solution* (the Council's Head of Economic Development), '*younger entrepreneurial, creative people … beginning to exercise their lungs to a degree they hadn't before'* (a leader in the cultural sector).

Although the significant performative and attributed power facilitated by the economic development discourse lead to its acceptance without challenge by stakeholders, the discourse had limitations in terms of its ability to flesh out the content of strategy. In part this may reflect the limitations of the attributed power of the Council's leadership. As the CEO of a heritage organisation observed, '*I suspect the Leader set a parameter* [but] *doesn't want to fill in a lot of the detail.* This limitation facilitated the power of the stakeholders who, whilst fully accepting the economic development discourse, were not actually interested in talking about it. Rather, the narratives that would predominate in the secondary consultation phase were those that 'sustain and enhance the prerogatives of stakeholders', that 'facilitate and legitimise the exercise of power' (Knights & Morgan, 1991). This is exemplified by the preponderance of narratives, expressed during this phase, which concerned the need for change in the way things were organised, despite all evidence pointing to an already highly successful tourism sector.

For stakeholders change became a virtue in its own right. As an hotelier put it: '*I am optimistic that there seem to be people who have lots of enthusiasm to change things … I can feel the change coming and that's why I'm excited by it'*. These

change narratives did not involve specific ideas or innovation. The Chair of Visit York noted in the strategy group that nothing had emerged from the consultation it couldn't have written itself beforehand: '*I haven't really had anybody say anything to me left-field, which I wasn't expecting*'; the strategy-making process was '*not rocket science'* (the CEO of Visit York)*; Rather these narratives were concerned with creating a shared goal: '*If people think their goal is shared they will have an incentive to go there together*' (a leader in the cultural sector); '*the possibility of one voice for York*' (a business leader). Essentially the change argued for concerned changes to delivery structures in tourism and destination management, changes that would disrupt the current power structures.

One expression of this shared goal was heard in narratives arguing that the strategy should primarily be concerned with enabling a strong and vibrant business community. This narrative, which ultimately lead to the core principle "*A business proposition and perspective*" within the *Interim Strategy,* argued for a re-distribution of power to the principal businesses and institutions in the city, calling for a "streamlining" of the various competing groups in York in order to reduce opposing voices and improve collaboration. As an hotelier put it, '*I would say we should jump on those who are positive and maybe involve them even more in a very clear framework'*. Stakeholders saw an opportunity to become part of a powerful new organisation in the city that was going to replace existing organisations that currently held the power.

Unofficial leadership

As the secondary phase of consultation drew to an end the steering group now needed to draw up a document expressing the emerging strategy. This would be styled as an *Interim Strategy*. At this point, the Chair of Visit York decided that, to inform this process, she needed her own stakeholder reference group, to run in parallel to the formal steering group. Her justification for this was that she needed to surround herself with those individuals who would be those best placed to advise her on the organisational changes to delivery structures argued for in stakeholder narratives. These individuals, drawn from the cultural, higher education, economic development and business sectors of the city, would be chosen on the basis that they were not identified with the current power bases of the Council and Visit York. I

was to attend as an observer. The group would be unofficial, "under the radar", "code named" the "Rainbow Group".

The Rainbow Group gave the Chair of Visit York a further outlet for her informal leadership. Having led the stakeholder discussions in the second phase of consultation she now surrounded herself with a number of key individuals able to influence their respective organisations. Whilst the group was reminded at every meeting that it had no formal decision-making role, it seemed to me that there was a "nod and a wink" implicit in this; everyone round the table understood that they were to be influential in determining the direction of the strategy-making.

Rainbow group was shown a draft of the *Interim Strategy* document. They were not happy with the *Doubling the value of tourism* strapline which one member described as 'not very visionary' and another as having 'too narrow a focus'. This dissention gave the Chair of Visit York the opportunity to place on the table *York is the brand*, as a central proposition, with the phrase *York – exceptional, compelling world city* as the strapline. *York is the brand* was an idea that had been framed by the Chair of Visit York during the stakeholder workshops. It reflected the observation that York's greatest asset is the strength of its brand awareness internationally and that visitors are attracted to experience the city as a whole rather than any particular facet or amenity. It was, of course, a unifying proposition, of interest to stakeholders beyond the tourism sector.

It was decided round the Rainbow Group table that *Doubling the value* of tourism would be relegated to page 2 in the *Interim Strategy* document. Whilst I was nervous about relegating the Council Leader's economic development imperative on the say so of a group that had no status, it felt to me that it was the inevitable price of keeping on board some of the city's most influential stakeholders. With the document printed, the Chair of Visit York was now able to make *York is the brand* the focus of her leadership, engaging stakeholders in a discussion about how the proposition could work for them. It generated immediate excitement and quickly came to dominate stakeholders' strategic talk.

The significance of the Chair of Visit York's "unofficial" leadership was repeatedly referred to by stakeholders: '*The leadership for the strategy has officially been the Council's cabinet member, but I think the unofficial leadership has very much been the Chair of Visit York, and … I think that has been really key to going forward'* (the Council's Head of Economic Development)*;* it formed the '*voice of the project'* (an hotelier). Her *York is the brand* proposition offered something to all stakeholders. '*Couched in terms of collaboration, coordination and engagement, it invited [people] to be part of the process.*' (the Council's Head of Economic Development)*;* It was '*about … how the strategy talks to you and will work for you*' (the Council Leader). It was powerful in building community across all sectors: '[*Stakeholders*] *understand the value that the place has for their own organisation's success ... It is a perception that more is going to be done … the perception that we are joining forces to achieve more*' (a Visit York officer).

The impact of the Chair of Visit York's unofficial leadership can be understood through Cross and Parker's (2004) work on patterns of collaboration within social networks which shows how some actors are more effective than others in getting others to accept their ideas. She functioned as an "energiser": as a senior manager in the HE sector observed, '*She has real energy and drive and she's kind of bolshie',* whilst the Council's Cabinet Member commented that '*she is a good speaker; she is … someone who can talk to anyone confidently.*' The CEO of Visit York recalled that 'w*hen she talks she inspires people. I remember the first hoteliers meeting: they were excited'.* The CEO of a heritage organisation observed, *'the Chair is the main mover in this … she will drive you … you will have to talk to her an awful lot … her energy is amazing! …It was her role … to stir it up, become a little whirlpool as an attraction to people*'. She created a sense of drama: '*we cannot go out and give everyone everything in one go because they get used to that; very shortly after they say, "what's next?"*' (an hotelier).

A good deal of the Chair of Visit York's energy went into persuading stakeholders that with the inevitability of future reductions in local authority funding, current delivery structures could not remain as they were. As she put it, '*It does concentrate the mind wonderfully when you know there is a big cut coming down the line.*' Stakeholders heard the message. As the Council Leader observed, she put in '*a*

large amount of work to … make people realise that the current model is unsustainable', whilst the CEO of a heritage organisation noted, *'That's a big stick ... She will say, "We can't carry on; the world is changing."'*

Stakeholders were also impressed by her listening skills: '*Things started to happen once she had started to listen to businesses'* (the Council's Project Officer); *'She has got skill in repeating back what you need to hear … she can mirror what individuals need to hear from the process'* (the Council's Head of Economic Development). She shared stakeholders' language; it mattered that she comes from the north east: '*that's important: this is not a southerner*' (the Council's Head of Economic Development). It also helped that she came from outside, that she was '*a new person who had no baggage'* (the Council's Head of Economic Development); '*Maybe it took somebody … recently external to York to fly overhead*' (a business leader).

Critically, the Chair of Visit York's modus operandi created the trust that is essential if stakeholders are to speak up (Cross & Parker, 2004). Stakeholders stressed the significance of the Chair of Visit York spending a great deal of time in communicating, networking, and keeping people informed, '*dripping through the right information at the right time to excite people to buy in … communicat[ing] with people in the right way'* as a hotelier put it. She herself described this as '*just elbow grease. You just have to keep talking to people, to keep convincing people that you're not doing them down, and that you have respect for their perspectives and expertise.*' Trust was enhanced through transparency. As a leader in the cultural sector commented, '*There is value in having the conversations and constantly feeding back so that no-one feels conversations are taking place without their knowledge … that is an important part in creating levels of understanding.*'

The attributed power of the Chair of Visit York owed a great deal to her ability to operate effectively in informal settings. Stakeholders recognised the importance of her role in creating settings for what she described as '*testing ideas with each other*'. The Council's Head of Economic Development observed, '*I suppose the overriding feeling is that very much in this process … it is the informal element, it is the informal relationships, it's the things that go on outside the project steering group, that have*

actually been the most influential', whilst a business leader commented, *'I needed somewhere to meet other people to talk about it in a semi-formal way and that's what* [the informal meetings] *provided …* [they happened] *without leaving a footprint.'* A leader in the cultural sector contrasted this with the more formal settings: *'Having the councillors in those meetings does absolutely stop everything … I agree that they are the most important people in the room but that doesn't help the rest of us.'*

These informal structures were also seen as essential to the "escape" required for creative thinking (Plsek, 1997). As a leader in the cultural sector observed, *'I think that the whole process of collaboration is better when it's relatively ill-defined. You do need some kind of superstructure but a creative mindset generally happens outside that structure.'* The same stakeholder credited the Chair of Visit York with giving '*people space to think more broadly about change and I think that she has created an atmosphere where people can start thinking … There does need to be a place for people to have these types of conversations which are not earth bound by the nitty-gritty of PIs,'* whilst another valued the opportunity *'… to throw the crazy ideas on the table ... in a way you could not do at the official meeting.'*

Critically, the informal approach allowed the Chair of Visit York to hand pick participants who were supportive of York is the brand. It also enabled individuals to participate in strategy-making informally whose organizations would not have allowed them to participate on an official basis, allowing, as the Council's Head of Economic Development put it, *'the key stakeholders to be part of shaping [the strategy] without officially being part of it'*. The informal approach was sufficiently expedient for the strategy steering group to abandon its original plan to move on from the *Interim Strategy* to produce a final strategy document. Instead, the focus shifted to a proposition to create a new city marketing and business development agency. Any formal, detailed document could only represent a risk to the consensus that would enable this new agency to be created. With the informal approach working so well there was nothing to be gained by any further document.

Summing up

What we see, then, in the strategy-making is the performative power of the economic development discourse, bolstered by the attributed power of the formal leadership,

'guiding people's perceptions to arrive at a particular interpretation of issues' (Kornberger & Clegg, 2011, p. 148), and powerfully laying down the terms in which strategy will be structured and which voices will be heard. What we also see, however, is the performative power facilitated by the strategy-making context, combining with the attributed power of informal leadership, creating a community of stakeholders who appropriate the strategy-making to serve their needs through narratives that enhance their position.

What then of the authentic voice of stakeholders that I, in my role as the Council's lead officer, set out to find? With the voice of some stakeholder groups having been marginalised, it would be difficult to conclude that authenticity, as it has been defined here as a collective struggle reflecting multiple perspectives, including those that counter the dominant discourse, had been encountered in the outcome of strategy-making in the case study. It would be more natural to conclude that it is power, rather than authenticity, that has been encountered. Yet many stakeholders, at least amongst those that were active in the strategy-making, strongly identified with the *Interim Strategy* and felt that it fully represented their view. As one put it, '*I think* [the *Interim Strategy* document] *is excellent and definitely reflects the stakeholders*'. Apparently only I noticed that some voices had been silenced in the strategy-making. What seems to be happening is that a <u>perceived</u> authenticity is projected onto those powerful performative narratives that are expounded by those with attributed power. It might be argued that in this context authenticity is shown to be "up for grabs", "negotiated" rather than concrete.

Conclusion

This research builds on previous studies which characterise tourism strategy-making in terms of complexity theory. The interactions between stakeholders from which strategy emerges (Baggio, Scott, & Cooper, 2010; Lane & Maxfield, 1996), the "backstage activity" (Darwin, 2001) concerning the power and politics of strategy-making, are seen as more important than the formal practices and structures employed or the plan that emerges, whilst governance is seen as concerned with managing these interactions.

The complexity and "messiness" of the environment has inevitably led the study into an inter-disciplinary approach as it seeks to understand the agent interaction at work. Whilst referencing institutional, stakeholder and network theories that focus on the power of structure, it goes beyond such approaches in order to capture the voice of the individual actor, recognising that, whilst 'structures matter, … it is agents who interpret these structures and take decisions' (Marsh & Smith, 2000, p. 5).

Through a strategy as narrative or discourse approach (Barry & Elmes, 1997) (Kornberger & Clegg, 2011), whereby strategy is constituted and reconstituted in the "strategic talk" of the stakeholders, the study examines strategy-making as social practice (Hendry, 2000) at the same time throwing light on the flows of power that animate the process, described in two interacting spheres: *performative* and *attributed* power, inherent, to varying degrees, in the narratives of the stakeholders.

This picture of the exercise of power is consistent with a view of power as 'mediated and realised in actor-specific practice' (Bramwell & Meyer, 2007, p. 769), revealing the dynamic effect of the power of particular interest groups (John, 2012). The contribution of the present study lies in its practical ability to explain how power works to make some voices heard in strategy-making whilst others are marginalised.

In seeking an *authentic voice* in the expression of multiple competing realities in strategy-making the study in fact encountered power whilst a *perceived authenticity* acted as a form of validation, providing legitimacy for the exercise of power along conventional lines. What are the study's implications for governance of strategy-making? Whilst its immediate findings are context-specific any wider application of the findings might suggest that there are limitations to viewing strategy-making in terms of complex systems where governance is concerned with structuring relationship according to their "generative potential" (Lane & Maxfield, 1996). What is lacking in this approach is an understanding of the role of power combined with theory concerning the management of power relations between the stakeholders; without this the "generative potential" will tend to be primarily for the generation of power.

The study has significant implications for tourism strategy-making as an important area of public policy-making, pointing to the need for further work to understand the power differentials between actors, the extent to which marginalised groups are effectively silenced by the *negotiated authenticity* arrived at by the more powerful stakeholders, and how all stakeholders might be enabled to contribute equally to strategy-making through the allocation of appropriate resources to those stakeholders whose power is relatively weak. Only then can effective strategy emerge that represents the *authentic voice* of diverse communities and stakeholders (Dredge, 2006). As long as the exercise of power remains the "ghost in the process" (Mcauley, 2003) the quieter voices are likely to remain unheard.

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