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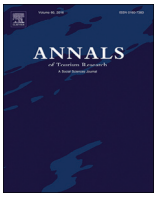

# Critical tourism strategy

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ABSTRACT

Destination strategies are central to the future development of tourism. They are typically created using a traditional management studies approach, characterized by an emphasis on growing visitor numbers along with varying commitments to sustainability. This article argues that this approach has significant shortcomings which present a research gap. To address this, the idea of critical tourism strategy is first further developed and then applied. Using a framework analysis based on critical tourism strategy, a sample of 17 English-language strategies is evaluated. The findings note many areas of good practice but also highlight important silences, omissions, and hidden biases. The conclusions advocate the widening of strategic horizons to deliver tourism guided by values as well as volumes.



## Introduction

Strategies play a significant role in the development of tourism. They provide visions for the future, define key issues, prioritise actions and channel resources. They derive authority from their professional authorship and endorsement by governments. But whilst considerable research efforts have been mobilised to develop tourism strategies, they have largely operated in the paradigm of traditional management studies. They have lacked serious critique, a deficiency underlined by Phillips and Moutinho (2014, p.110) who noted "the paucity of strategic planning research in tourism".

This research gap is redressed by the development and application of critical tourism strategy with three objectives. The first is to develop a better understanding of Critical Tourism Strategy. The second is to develop a research instrument based on Critical Tourism Strategy principles, and the third is to discover what is revealed through a critical analysis of tourism strategies and how they fall short of their full potential.

The next section develops the theory of Critical Tourism Strategy. It uses the four domains approach, with an examination of the key elements of Critical Tourism Strategy (Section 2.4) and a comparison with the three alternative domains (Sections 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4). The method outlines the technique of critical strategy research and the collection and analysis of data. The findings and discussion analyse the key themes and uncover important silences, omissions and hidden biases resulting from close critical analysis. Rather than having its own section, relevant literature is discussed under each of these headings. Finally, conclusions are drawn, together with implications for theory and practice.

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**Table 1**
Four domains of tourism strategy.

| Management perspective | Features |
|---|---|
| Traditional tourism strategy | Application of management science<br>Focus on efficiency and profitability |
| Mindful tourism strategy | Analysis of wider costs and benefits<br>Focus on management in society |
| Critical tourism strategy | Analysis of power and interests<br>Focus on management for emancipation |
| Marxist tourism strategy | Analysis of capital accumulation<br>Focus on labour relations |

## Critical approach to tourism strategy

### *Critical management theory*

In a critique of management research, Klikauer (2018) presents a four perspectives model. Traditional Management Studies (TMS) is identified as the mainstream approach ("less 'about' management but more 'for' management" (p.760), with a strong emphasis on the science of management. Critical Management Studies "follows a mostly hermeneutical-interpretive approach in an attempt to semi-critically re-evaluate what TMS and management do … [and] … to inform TMS on its more obvious fallacies" (p.760). Critical Management Theory is "dedicated to the heritage of the Frankfurt School of critical theory" (p.760). The Marxist Management Theory variant of critique has "a somewhat stronger emphasis on labour process theory and political economy" (p.760). Although critical theory has flourished in the social science of tourism, it has remained largely undeveloped in tourism management studies. Indeed, a literature search for critical tourism management reveals little attention other than in hospitality (Lugosi, Lynch, & Morrison, 2009).

To address this gap, the critical dimension of tourism strategy is explicated by the adaptation of Klikauer's four perspectives model. But some confusion is apparent in Klikauer's model by the duplication of the term "critical" in two of the domains. To rectify this, we propose a modification to his model. We restrict the use of "critical" exclusively to the domain informed by critical theory. To accommodate this, we rename his domain of "Critical Management Studies", that is not informed by critical theory, as "Mindful Management". This results in the proposed four domains of Tourism Strategy. These are Traditional Tourism Strategy, Mindful Tourism Strategy, Critical Tourism Strategy, and Marxist Tourism Strategy, which are outlined in Table 1. The domains are identified separately for analytical clarity, and although practitioners will mainly operate within one domain, they may bring in perspectives from other domains.

### *Traditional tourism strategy*

Tourism strategy is a specialized application of strategy that has a long history and rich literature, pioneered by writers such as Mintzberg (1967), Drucker (1968), Porter (1985) and Ansoff (1988). Each operated within the Traditional Strategy paradigm and it is this paradigm that informs texts on tourism strategy such as Tribe (2016) and Moutinho and Vargas-Sanchez (2018). Tourism strategy is defined by Tribe (2016) as "the planning of a desirable future and the design of a suitable programme for achieving it" (p.7). It encompasses a range of contexts including the thematic (e.g., sustainability) and the organizational (e.g., The Walt Disney Corporation) but for this study the focus is on destinations. Terms such as tourism planning and development may sometimes cover a similar territory. Tourism policy usually relates to the regulations and rules that govern tourism, but some destination policies turn out to be more akin to strategies.

Traditional Tourism Strategies are formulated in a standardised way. They generally start with a statement of mission setting out the destination's guiding principles and what kind of destination it wishes to be (Ritchie, 1993). Next strategic analysis assesses resources and capabilities as well as the external environment, as discussed by Mayaka and Prasad (2012) for Kenya tourism. Stakeholder input is also generally sought (Croft, 2018). The finished strategy outlines mission, objectives, directions and methods, and implementation plans. The traditional approach emphasises objectivity and value freedom and develops strategy as a "logical and sequential set of actions … to find the best strategy to suit the conditions at hand" (Tribe, 2016, p. 18–19). The emphasis is on technique, process, and control.

However, a critical lens finds Traditional Tourism Strategy wanting. For example, Habermas's (1978) study on knowledge and human interests reminds us that it operates with a technical interest. That is an interest in applying science to find technically efficient solutions without much regard to the consequences for the broader life world. The emphasis is on means rather than ends. It overlooks other perspectives, notably philosophy (what is the good life?) and sociology (who are the winners and losers and why?). The comprehensive use, persistence, authority, and overwhelming presence of Traditional Tourism Strategy can be seen as an example of managerialism (Klikauer, 2015) where the science of management becomes an ideology (the accepted blueprint of how things should be done).

*Mindful tourism strategy*

This offers a more thoughtful approach to strategy. At the theoretical level alternative understandings of strategy are entertained. These include the evolutionary, processual, and systemic schools that demonstrate the shortcomings of the traditional approach. They emphasise the importance of understanding complexity, fallibility, and fluidity (Whittington, 2001). Mindful Strategic Management is likely to consider not just the narrow concerns of achieving a specific outcome but also take account of the wider context in which a strategy operates. This entails an understanding of management in society, an analysis of impacts and a balanced approach to management. There are several frameworks that can underpin Mindful Strategy. First, U.N. Sustainable Development Goals can provide guidance for overall aims. Second, the use of social cost-benefit analysis can be used to evaluate proposals in terms of broad societal rather than narrow economic impacts. Third, plans may be informed by principles of responsible tourism (Goodwin, 2016). These include co-operation between governments, labour and industry, commitments to social justice and equality, decent work, and respect for the environment.

Mindful evaluations of tourism strategies include Gascón (2015) who evaluates the ability of pro-poor tourism as a strategy to fight rural poverty. Similarly, Aygün and Baycan (2020) analyse Turkey's Tourism Strategy with an emphasis on mitigation and adaptation to climate change. The critique offered in Mindful Tourism Strategy is partial.

*Critical tourism strategy*

Bianchi (2009) critiqued the critical turn in tourism as more of a cultural turn which "appears largely confined to questions of culture, discourse and representation within the confines of a globalizing free market system, which remains largely external to critical scrutiny" (p.487). We address this critique by ensuring that critical strategy uses robust techniques developed by the Frankfurt School to scrutinise the state of tourism. Further, following Horkheimer (1972), critical strategy should also critique the functions of institutions and actions of individuals through analysis of their broader social and historical contexts. It should then explain what is wrong with current understandings, identify who can change them, and provide practical objectives for transformative change which satisfy the needs and aspirations of all those involved. Critical Tourism Strategy is unpacked under the themes of ideology, power, ideal speech communities, and emancipation.

Althusser (1984), among others, alerts us to the importance of ideology, loosely defined as the constellation of ideas that we share about how the world functions and how we function in it. Its consequences are explained by Tribe (2007, p. 284):

> Ideology, then, frames thought, and guides action and its presence may lead to the suppression and partial exclusion of other worldviews. But the operation of an ideology can remain hidden from view, for the deeply embedded nature and long tradition of a particular ideology can serve to camouflage its existence … so that it becomes the taken for granted way of thinking and doing. It becomes the accepted or common-sense view of the world.

So the first job of Critical Tourism Strategy is ideology critique. This means identifying ideological influences (e.g., "normal" paradigms of growth and profit), understanding their consequences and considering alternatives. Giddens (1984, p.26) views the process of ideology critique as "breaking free from the straightjacket of thinking only in terms of the type of society we know in the here and now".

Next, understandings about the sources and effects power are central to Critical Tourism Strategy. According to Alvesson and Deetz (2020, p.144) "critique explicitly relates to the conditions of power, constraint, social asymmetries, ideological domination, cultural inertia that give privilege to certain ways of understanding and ordering the world". Access to formal and symbolic resources create the main sources of power and Foucault (1980) underlines the importance of discursive power. This is elaborated by Knights and Morgan (1991, p.254) who identify discourse "as shorthand for a whole set of power/knowledge relations which are written, spoken, communicated and embedded in social practices." They further add … "it is possible to identify a discourse of strategy that has … its own historical conditions of possibility; it embodies particular ways of seeing organizations, subjects and societies." (p.255). An analysis of power identifies where and how power manifests itself in tourism, its consequences and the winners and losers of competing strategic options.

Habermas (1985) helps to determine what is a good strategy and what are good outcomes for those affected by it. Many strategies seek legitimacy by stakeholder input. The problem is that those stakeholders with most urgency and power tend to get their claims prioritized (Rodrigues Serna, Nakandala, & Bowyer, 2022). The challenge according to Habermas is to reject stakeholder arguments based on manipulation, control, domination, and asymmetrical power-play. Instead, he proposes communicative action with democratic public discussion, and decision-making based on ideal speech communities. The lesson for Critical Tourism Strategy is to engage with stakeholders under Habermas's conditions where they must speak truthfully, comprehensibly, freely and with equal access, aiming to reach consensus and reasoned decisions.

Critical Tourism Strategy also differs from the traditional and mindful domains in having what Habermas (1978) called the emancipatory interest (Boluk & Carnicelli, 2019) at its heart. Simply put, rather than people and the planet being the *means* to achieving a destination's strategic ends of more profitable tourism, the improvement of the conditions of people and the planet become the *ends* of a good strategy. Critical Tourism Strategy has human improvement as its telos (Caton, 2012) based on critical rethinking. Table 2 elaborates the major concerns of Critical Tourism Strategy. They are distilled from the writings of critical scholars and used to inform the framework analysis.

**Table 2**
Concerns of critical tourism strategy.

- To understand the existence and operation of power relations
- To uncover underlying ideology
- To determine whose interests are served
- To determine who are the winners and losers
- To determine which significant truths and issues are omitted and which promoted
- To understand what and whose values are implicit/dominant
- To understand the effect of organizational culture
- To propose action to improve the conditions of people and the planet

*Marxist tourism strategy*

Marxist strategy is rooted in a radical critique of capitalism where Bianchi (2009) calls for "a structural analysis of the material forces of power and inequality within globalizing capitalism and liberalized modes of tourism development" (pp.497–498). An important corollary is the Marxist challenge to the neoclassical view of the pre-eminence of free markets and market equilibrium as the inevitable, taken for granted drivers of development.

Looking beneath the apparent efficacy of free markets, one aspect of Marxist analysis focusses on the processes of capital accumulation. Simply put, the reinvestment of profits creates a cycle of accumulation, assigning more power to capital owners over aspects of the economy and society. Tourism strategies typically uncritically court inward investment, ignoring questions about the consequences of capital deployment and resource exploitation, or possible controls and taxes on capital deployment or the regulation of monopolies.

Traditional Strategy and to a lesser extent Mindful Strategy approaches can sometimes be complicit in the exploitation of workers as part of their project for the efficient management of labour and the enhancement of profit for the owners. For free markets often treat labour as just another dispensable factor of production ignoring its human dimensions. In contrast, Labour Process Theory (Adler, 2007) reveals how capitalist production necessities efforts to reduce costs resulting in the deskilling of workers, conflict between employees and employers, reduced worker autonomy and greater management control. Bianchi (2011) also relates that "Central to Marx's analysis of wage labour is the concept of 'alienation' through which he explains how capitalism alienates the worker from the product of their labour as well as themselves" (p.16). Crucial questions are thereby raised for tourism strategies around the protection of labour and the promotion of workers' benefits, well-being, and conditions of employment.

Additionally, many strategies are created for developing countries where tourism was initially seen as an effective means for modernisation and economic development. But as Bianchi (2018, p.98) notes:

> neoMarxist theories of tourism and dependency/underdevelopment … served to highlight the manner in which the development of tourism in these nascent 'Third World' economies was implicated in the production and reproduction of systemic inequalities between 'core' and 'peripheral' states.

Issues for consideration in strategies for developing countries include the power of TransNational Corporations, predator capitalism, resource grabbing, and economic leakages.

## Research method

Having differentiated between the alternative theoretical approaches to tourism strategy, the method adopted here is critical strategy research. But as Alvesson and Deetz (2020) note, "little is present in critical theory that encourages a move from in-depth questioning orientations and somewhat distant theoretical debates to enter empirical work in 'the field'" (p.2). This section addresses this lacuna and offers advice on how to conduct critical empirical research.

The sampling commenced with a comprehensive search for strategies. Some documents used the terms policy, blueprint, plan, or deal and these were included if they shared the same basic characteristics as strategy documents (i.e., the setting out of a reasoned plan and scheme for implementation). From this a longlist of strategies was compiled that fulfilled the following criteria:

- Inclusion of a global range
- Inclusion of developed and less developed destinations
- Inclusion of exemplar destinations at the forefront of social engagement
- Inclusion of exemplar destinations in neoliberal countries
- Exclusion of pure marketing strategies
- In current use at the time of research
- Availability of English version

The final list of strategies analysed is illustrated in Table 3. The eventual sample of seventeen was not fixed or predetermined but finalized when data saturation was comfortably achieved with no new insights emerging.

**Table 3**
Tourism destination strategies analysed.

| Place | Title | Date |
|---|---|---|
| BERMUDA | Bermuda Agility National Tourism Plan | 2019 |
| BHUTAN | Tourism Policy of The Kingdom of Bhutan | 2019 |
| CANADA | Creating Middle Class Jobs: A Federal Tourism Growth Strategy | 2019 |
| FIJI | Fijian Tourism 2021 | 2019 |
| FINLAND | Finland's Tourism Strategy 2019–2028 | 2020 |
| IRELAND | People, Place and Policy Growing Tourism to 2025 | 2015 |
| ITALY | Strategic Plan for Tourism 2017–2022 | 2017 |
| JORDAN | Jordan Tourism Strategy 2021–2025 | 2021 |
| KENYA | The National Tourism Blueprint 2030 | 2017 |
| MALTA | Recover, Rethink, Revitalise, Malta Tourism Strategy 2021–2030 | 2021 |
| NEW ZEALAND | New Zealand-Aotearoa Government Tourism Strategy | 2019 |
| NORWAY | National Tourism Strategy 2030 | 2021 |
| QATAR | Qatar National Tourism Sector Strategy 2030 | 2015 |
| SOUTH AFRICA | National Tourism Sector Strategy 2016–2026 | 2017 |
| UK | Tourism Sector Deal | 2019 |
| VIENNA | Vienna Visitor Economy Strategy 2025 | 2021 |
| VIETNAM | Vietnam Tourism Development Strategy to 2030 | 2020 |

Data was analysed by two researchers with expertise in critical tourism and strategy. Having considered various approaches to analysing texts (e.g., Critical Discourse Analysis, Thematic Analysis, Content Analysis and Framework Analysis) it was decided to use a modified version of Framework Analysis to create a Critical Framework Analysis. Srivastava and Thomson (2009, p.72) argue that "framework analysis is better adapted to research that has specific questions, a limited time frame, a pre-designed sample and a priori issues." This research did not aim to identify common strategic patterns or themes from the sample data by taking an inductive approach. Rather it was inspired by an a priori set of issues (generated from critical theory) against which to interrogate the data and represents a form of standpoint research (Humberstone, 2004). The five steps advocated by Srivastava and Thomson (2009, p.72) "familiarisation; identifying a thematic framework; indexing; charting; and mapping and interpretation" were followed and each is now explained.

Each researcher read and re-read contrasting strategies to become immersed in and familiarized with the data. Paradoxically Alvesson and Deetz (2020) also stress the importance of de-familiarisation.

> … to avoid seeing the corporate world as self-evident and familiar, and rather to conceptualize it as a strange place. Research then becomes a matter of de-familiarisation, of observing and interpreting social phenomena in novel ways compared to culturally dominant categories and distinctions. De-familiarisation means that we see things not as natural or rational but as exotic and arbitrary (p.167).

Primed by this insight we strove to suspend our normal ready acceptance of corporate strategy-speak and our customary acquiescence to its "expert" recommendations.

Next, the critical framework was developed. This involved the translation of the ideas of critical theory into specific areas to probe enabling the foregrounding of hidden issues of power and interest, the consequences of these and the possibilities for greater emancipatory outcomes. Alvesson and Deetz (2020, p.171) also prompted thinking about counter text, negations and in a dialectic way:

> It is in the state of tension between different realized ideas and practices on the one hand, and alternatives to these on the other, that it becomes possible to avoid getting caught by established ideas and institutions …. By negating the existing order, it becomes possible to see it in a different and meaningful way.

Their work also encouraged the seeking out of extraordinary alternatives and possibilities for transformative re-definitions of elements of strategy.

Table 4 outlines the ideas and probes for the critical framework arising from the initial readings. These were based on principles of critical theory, incorporating ideas raised by Alvesson and Deetz (2020) and adjusted following researcher discussion and piloting for usability.

The next stage - indexing and charting - involved carefully reading each strategy and identifying text that resonated with the critical ideas and probes. Columns 1 and 2 of Table 4 illustrate the alphanumerical index system that was used to mark the text. Charting followed, where the data marked in the indexing stage was placed in column 3 of Table 4, using a fresh table for each strategy. Column 4 was used to record comments as the data was analysed. Row E recorded notes about illustrations in the documents and Row F was used for a brief summary of each critical evaluation. Row G was used to record cumulative notes on patterns emerging.

The final stage, mapping and interpretation, involved creating an interpretive text. Notes from column 4 and row G were used to identify the key thematic headings for the findings and structure the argument which was also informed by the literature and illustrated by the data collected in column 3. References to the texts in the strategies use the format **COUNTRY** (page number), e.g., **FIJI** (7). Care was taken to ensure that the argument conformed to qualitative research principles of plausibility, transparency,

**Table 4**
Critical framework analysis.

| Name of strategy | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Column 1 | Column 2 | Column 3 | Column 4 |
| Critical ideas | Critical probes | Text | Comment |
| A. General | 1. What is the main emphasis? | | |
| | 2. What is the overall tone? | | |
| | 3. Is there any evidence of discursive closure? | | |
| | 4. What limitations arise from the theoretical structure adopted by the strategy? | | |
| | 5. What is absent or overlooked? | | |
| B. Power | 1. What power dynamics are revealed? | | |
| | 2. What societal injustices does the strategy reinforce? | | |
| C. Interests | 1. What ideology is implicit? | | |
| | 2. What and whose values are implicit / dominant? | | |
| | 3. What / whose interests are served? | | |
| | 4. Who or what gains? | | |
| | 5. Who or what loses? | | |
| D. Emancipation | 1. Which actions improve the conditions of people and the planet? | | |
| | 2. What societal injustices does the strategy address? | | |
| | 3. What counter texts could be produced? | | |
| | 4. What extraordinary alternatives can be imagined? | | |
| | 5. Are there any alternative emancipatory possibilities? | | |
| | 6. What are the possibilities for a transformative re-definition of strategy? | | |
| E. Illustrations | | | |
| F. Summary | | | |
| G. Cumulative notes | | | |

confirmability and trustworthiness, and the draft findings were revised after re-checking for accuracy against the strategy documents.

## Findings and discussion

The main themes emerging from the analysis are illustrated in Table 5 which also links them to the critical probes of the research.

**Table 5**
Themes and links to the critical probes.

| Themes | Critical probes |
|---|---|
| 1. Privileging business and the economy | What is the main emphasis?<br>What is the overall tone?<br>What ideology is implicit?<br>What and whose values are implicit / dominant? |
| 2. Privileging the tourist | What / whose interests are served?<br>Who or what gains? |
| 3. Critical neglect | Who or what loses?<br>What is absent or overlooked?<br>What societal injustices does the strategy reinforce? |
| 4. Picturing tourism | Is there any evidence of discursive closure?<br>What is absent or overlooked?<br>What societal injustices does the strategy reinforce? |
| 5. Hopeful Signs | Which actions improve the conditions of people and the planet?<br>What societal injustices does the strategy address? |
| 6. Power and interest | What ideology is implicit?<br>Is there any evidence of discursive closure?<br>What limitations arise from the theoretical structure adopted by the strategy?<br>What power dynamics are revealed? |
| 7. Critical rethinking | What counter texts could be produced?<br>What extraordinary alternatives can be imagined?<br>Are there any alternative emancipatory possibilities?<br>What are the possibilities for a transformative re-definition? |

*Privileging business and the economy*

It is to be expected that strategies address business and economic needs. But it was found that these areas were not only well-covered but also dominant topics which helped to establish an ideology for destination strategies (Althusser, 1984) that privileges the business and economic above other interests. Priorities included the tourist, arrivals, earnings, product development, employment, infrastructure, marketing, markets, competition, investment, and transport. For example, **FIJI's** strategy identifies nine thematic areas for development all with an economic and business focus except #6 which concerns sustainable development. These dominant topics are further privileged by being quantified: "The overall vision of the Fijian Tourism 2021 is to grow tourism into a $2.2 billion industry by 2021, increasing arrivals to Fiji to 930,000" (**FIJI**, 13). Measurable targets were given for business but rarely for social or environmental matters. **SOUTH AFRICA's** strategy opens with a strong emphasis on competitiveness, echoing the traditional strategy concern advocated by Porter (1985), and with economic and business benefits dominating the overall text. **VIETNAM** offers targets for arrivals, revenue, and jobs, whilst **KENYA**'s "primary reason for a tourism strategic plan is to increase the number of visitors to and their spend in a destination" (148). **IRELAND's** strategy has growth targets focused on increased visitor numbers, with "visitor revenue to grow approximately 5 % per year for ten years" (6). **BHUTAN** is the exception to this norm with a commitment to promoting high value, low volume tourism. More recent strategies, such as **MALTA** and **JORDAN**, draw attention to the impact of the COVID pandemic, with a particular emphasis on the importance of economic recovery.

*Privileging the tourist*

The tourist and their needs were generally privileged above the locals as exemplified by **IRELAND**'s target that "95 % of all visitors will be 'very satisfied' with Ireland as a destination" (6). This was also evident in **BERMUDA's** strategy which states "we need to think like a visitor" (4). This was facilitated by "research among more than 2000 people across the U.S., Canada and the U.K. to understand why, where and how they travel" (4). However, Helgadóttir, Einarsdóttir, Burns, Gunnarsdóttir, and Matthíasdóttir (2019) found that "residents were critical of the tourism industry and tourism management" (404) prompting counter textual questions of the strategies: Why not think like a resident? Or think for the planet? Or why not reverse the subject and object in **BERMUDA**'s success measure that "*Visitors* should be satisfied with their interactions with *locals*" (our italics) (9)? Similarly, **FIJI**'s strategy favoured the tourist "based on data from Fiji's 2017 International Visitor Survey" (14) with no data collected about the concerns of locals. **ITALY's** strategy also advocates "putting the tourist at the centre" (19). Contrast these cases with two exceptions. For **BHUTAN** tourism is planned to benefit all Bhutanese and *tourists* are assigned behaviour goals to "Act in a manner that respects the local culture, traditions and protection of nature; Support our local economy [and] Be a responsible guest" (15). For **VIENNA** resident satisfaction is "put on an equal footing with the quality of the experience for guests" (11).

*Critical neglect*

Gibson (2019, p.13) warns that "Tourism displacements, commodifications, exclusions, and exploitation warrant sustained scrutiny from critical tourism scholars." It was found that strategies were prone to overlook such negative impacts. Further, there were many missed opportunities to manage tourism as a force for improving the lives of citizens. Higgins-Desbiolles (2006) described how tourism can be more than an industry, having power as a social force. But without critical management, it can be a vehicle for perpetuating existing injustices. For example, by failing to identify tourism-related societal injustices, the **UK** strategy passively reinforces them. Strategies were not generally geared towards the betterment of society with most of them being quiet or even silent on major issues. Critical neglect is further explored under the following headings.

*Environmental sustainability*

Most strategies included some environmental awareness, and the analysis closely examined what specific measures were planned to mitigate tourism's use of environmental sources and sinks. For example, water and energy supplies are important tourism sources. Gössling et al. (2012) describe how water usage is a particular problem for some destinations and requires monitoring and management to avert future shortages. Yet few strategies gave prominence to water or energy consumption. **FIJI** discusses renewable energy and water supply, but steps were mainly limited to encouragement, with few specific actions: "The relevant sectors are encouraged to adopt climate change mitigation initiatives" (53). **FIJI** did however encourage the use of local products and the **VIENNA** strategy outlines "Premium Forever" standards, with a focus on "excellent drinking water and clean air …" (35).

Sinks are repositories for waste, and tourism's most troubling waste product is $CO_2$ with its increasing effect on global warming (Danish & Wang, 2018). Incredibly, whilst some strategies recognized environmental impacts, most strategies failed to register the climate emergency and the term climate does not feature in the **UK**, **JORDAN**, **CANADA**, or **ITALY** strategies at all. Higham, Ellis, and Maclaurin (2019) have underlined the need for national policy mechanisms to address tourist aviation emissions. But *increased* air transport was explicitly or implicitly central to the expansion of tourism in nearly all the strategies and the $CO_2$ effects of this were side-stepped. For example, the **UK** strategy supports the construction of a new runway at London Airport, stating: "The government believes that forecasted aviation demands up to 2030 can be met through a [new] Northwest runway" (43). Similarly, **FIJI** showed no appreciation of the $CO_2$ effects of air travel or strategies to address this. Rather it was noted that "expansion and increase in international flight frequency is crucial where/when demand is high" (43). Its strategy forecasts an "Increase Air Access to Fiji" and projects an "Increase Capacity of Domestic Flights" (44). **VIETNAM** prioritized "Upgrading, expanding and speeding up the construction of new airports" (3). International flights are crucial to **NEW ZEALAND**

tourism, but nothing concrete is advanced in its strategy to address their glaring and fundamental environmental impact. There were two notable exceptions. **NORWAY's** strategy outlines specific measures and targets to actively address $CO_2$ and environmental concerns, with calls for more sustainable business models and mainstreaming sustainable policies and practices. Similarly, **MALTA's** strategy acknowledges the "climate crisis" (83), with recognition of "the detrimental effects" of "unchecked climate change and global warming". It aims to "engage in a national and global effort aimed at achieving Climate Friendly Travel by 2050" (82).

Waste and sewerage also present challenges to rising tourist numbers. Ezeah, Fazakerley, and Byrne (2015) identify how the improper management of waste can lead to serious negative impacts. Yet plans to tackle these issues were rare. Even **BHUTAN**'s plans to "enhance initiatives to promote waste management" (13) were sketchy.

*Host impacts*

The exploitation of local heritage and culture as mechanisms for tourism growth was a consistent theme. For example, **CANADA's** strategy states that "to grow and benefit from tourism, communities must exploit and develop the characteristics that make them special" (19). It also points to "the Canadian Experiences Fund" which "will help Indigenous Peoples present their histories, traditional stories, creative arts and contemporary values to the world, whilst creating new economic opportunities" (20). Whilst heritage tourism has the potential to bring positive social and economic change to communities, the implications of cultural commodification are often overlooked. Few strategies took account of issues raised by Notzke (2004) who underlines the importance of moving away from exploitation to meaningful levels of engagement and collaboration. For example, **IRELAND**'s strategy describes people and places as assets that must be "mobilised" to exploit the economic benefits (9). Warnings from Ritzer (1992) about the McDonaldising effects on local culture and Alobiedat (2018) that local culture and tangible heritage may not have sufficient resilience or capacity to absorb tourism development were generally unheeded. Even in the cases of **BHUTAN**, which favours development of "mechanisms and safeguards to conserve and promote natural and cultural heritage" (13), **SOUTH AFRICA** which includes values of "Respect for our arts, culture and heritage …" (16), and **FIJI** whose strategy 22 is to "protect [its] unique cultural identity (54)", specific measures and deliverable actions were hard to find.

Despite a prolific literature on pro-poor tourism (Goodwin, 2009) few strategies included this as an objective. However, **SOUTH AFRICA** has "Broad Based Benefits" as one of its pillars which includes "Promot[ing] the empowerment of previously marginalised enterprises and rural communities to ensure inclusive growth of the sector" (36). Similarly, overtourism (Milano, Cheer, & Novelli, 2019) was rarely considered nor any limits to growth calculated by reference to carrying capacities. Rather, more tourism was almost uniformly seen as a good thing. One exception was **MALTA's** strategy, proclaiming "Less weighting to sheer volume growth in favour of an enhanced quality offer …, in line with sustainable development guidelines" (9).

*Exploitation and displacement*

Gibson (2019, p.8) observes that "tourism requires 'constitutive violence' that takes various forms, from loss of land, community, and language, to extraction, evictions, and enclosures, erasures, and (neo)colonialism …". The strategies showed little regard for the potential of tourism for exploitation. **BHUTAN** was unusual in its pledge to "develop safeguards to ensure that there is no sexual and commercial exploitation" (12). Analysis of quality of work and displacement revealed that most strategies viewed employment just in terms of numbers and training. **SOUTH AFRICA's** strategy plans to increase tourism jobs from about 1.5 to 2.2 million by 2026. The **UK** strategy states that "the industry will seek to attract, train and retain a more skilled workforce" (9), and whilst the **NEW ZEALAND, MALTA** and **CANADA** strategies point towards the transition to "high value" jobs, the strategies showed little concern about the quality of work or the extent to which the nature of tourism work can contribute to social divisions and economic inequalities. Robinson et al. (2019, p.1021) have warned of "the (increasingly) precarious nature of much tourism employment" and how it can fall short of "decent work". Issues such as wages, working conditions and those associated with the gig economy were rarely mentioned.

Despite the widespread displacement effects of coastal tourism development leading to the relocation of locals in **VIETNAM** (Duong, Samsura, & van der Krabben, 2020), the issue is not raised in its strategy. Similarly, Masai conflicts with safari tourism (Bhandari, 2014) in **KENYA** are ignored. Indeed, a whole range of displacement and exclusion effects of tourism were disregarded. These include housing supply and prices, and the associated displacement effects on locals of Airbnb and holiday homes, tourism-induced inflation, and gift shops, restaurants and bars displacing existing patterns of retail.

*Equality*

The strategies were probed to discover how issues of race and gender equality, and accessible tourism were portrayed. Britton (1991, p.459) noted that "tourism employment is often characterized by clear-cut ethnic and gender divisions of labour". Race inequality and opportunity is a significant issue for multiracial destinations and developing countries typically employ ex-pats in senior roles. These points are illustrated by Altink's (2021) findings from Jamaica, where.

> African Jamaicans have struggled to obtain the most senior posts in hotels. In fact, it has become even harder for them since the turn of the century with the building of many large foreign-owned all-inclusive resorts that have relied mostly on White, expat managers (p.281).

Yet a search for serious indigenization projects revealed only soft versions as exemplified in the **FIJI** strategy which aims to "encourage up-skilling and career development of Fijians in the industry with the aim of encouraging mentoring programmes

where locals understudy expatriates for career progression" (77). Note the use of encouragement rather than any more forceful directive. Similarly, the **SOUTH AFRICA** strategy (37) has an objective to "Achieve Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) targets" but omits to underpin these with the baseline measurements and the kind of specific targets which it ascribes to economic and business matters. These might include the number of black CEOs and senior executives, and pay comparisons. As often, **BHUTAN** marked a different approach expressing concern for unequal benefit sharing.

Cole (2018) has drawn attention to empowerment possibilities for women in tourism. Yet only three strategies took this issue seriously. **FINLAND's** strategy includes an Employment and Gender Impact Assessment (71), whilst the ambition of **JORDAN's** Human Resources Strategic Objective is to engage "women and people with disabilities in tourism careers and jobs" (13). **BHUTAN** intends to "promote mainstreaming of gender issues in the sector" and "enhance opportunities and broader participation for women" (pp. 12–13).

Nyanjom, Boxall, and Slaven (2018) explore how accessible tourism can be developed through well-targeted stakeholder collaboration. This study did find that accessibility was an overarching principle in **ITALY's** strategy and one of the most neoliberal strategies (**UK**) was very vocal on accessibility: "We will also work together to ensure that the UK becomes the most accessible tourism destination in Europe by 2025" (p3). However, these were exceptions and few strategies had comprehensive plans to promote tourism for all regardless of physical, intellectual, or other limitations.

*Aesthetics and design*

Kirillova and Fu (2014) have analysed the factors that make a destination beautiful. Yet despite tourism's considerable impact on the natural and built environment, none of the strategies included any mention of aesthetics or good design. This represents a significant lost opportunity to enhance the built environment of destinations rather than to leave them to the vagaries of ad hoc development.

*Picturing tourism*

Balomenou and Garrod (2019) advocate photography as a valuable source of visual research data and it was found that the pictures illustrating the strategies echoed their overall focus and tone avoiding an accurate portrayal of tourism. Rather, typical marketing images depicted glossy stereotypes of idyllic scenery, happy tourists, and interesting locals. This was particularly evident in the **NEW ZEALAND, MALTA,** and **IRELAND** strategies. **FIJI's** photos reinforced the commoditization of exotic locals (Cohen, 1988) (an indigenous costumed Fijian on beach lighting lantern, and 3 locals in grass skirts) and locals as a spectacle (a man in grass skirt watched by tourists). They are also complicit in the objectification of women (a bikinied woman on rope swing at a beach with the sea as background) and they promote the normalization of further $CO_2$ emissions with three aviation pictures (an airport concourse, an airplane, and another airplane). Exceptions included one illustration of a disabled traveller in the **UK** strategy and the **CANADIAN** strategy which included an image of an LGBTQ2 parade.

*Hopeful signs*

Despite the general promotion of business and economic interests above the social, cultural and the environmental, some hopeful signs emerged although many of these remained as unquantified aspirations. Hopeful signs for better tourism include political stability and peace (**IRELAND**, **QATAR**), enhanced cultural dialogue (**QATAR**), raising awareness of LGBTQ2 tourism (**CANADA**), and creating partnerships with native communities (**CANADA, NEW ZEALAND**). **VIENNA** and **NEW ZEALAND** acknowledged the implications of tourism for host communities. Some strategies made links to the Sustainable Development Goals (**NORWAY**, **BHUTAN**, **VIENNA, VIETNAM, MALTA**), with **FIJI** emphasising its commitment to these and "its chairmanship of the 23rd Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Climate Change" (50). **FIJI** also identified Sustainable Development Goals in its implementation plan. But overall, there was little follow through from these important global agendas or roadmaps to a better society (Boluk, Cavaliere, & Higgins-Desbiolles, 2019).

Other glimmers of hope included the **BERMUDA** strategy to develop tourism that is "growing by being Pink, Blue and Greener" (7) and intends that ">70 % of residents will support development of tourism in Bermuda" (13). But whilst many strategies touched upon environmental, social, and cultural issues, these were rarely assigned the same seriousness as economic issues, nor assigned measures or targets for improvement. For example, the **UK** strategy advocated "developing and caring for local attractions and amenities and managing growth so that investment enhances the lives of local residents as well as visitors" (12), but with no corresponding measures or concrete proposals. Similarly, there is no serious follow through to **VIETNAM**'s desire for green growth or adaptation to climate change. The **NEW ZEALAND** strategy includes many references to social and environmental wellbeing. "… we want tourism to improve New Zealanders' social, cultural, environmental and economic wellbeing" (6). But its actions fall back mainly on those to improve the economy and tourist satisfaction. **KENYA**'s strategy fails to see the paradox in "booming and sustainable tourism" (3). Similarly, the **IRELAND** strategy "anticipates and supports mobilisation of a comprehensive international response to climate change, and global transition to a low-carbon future" (21), yet seeks to secure "10 million visits to Ireland annually by 2025" (9).

*Power and interest*

Critical analysis helps explain the reasons for the omissions and imbalances evident in the strategies, discussed under the headings "Ideology", "Discourse", and "Power".

*Ideology*

Analysis of the strategies revealed that most were informed by Traditional Tourism Strategy operating within a prevailing global neoliberal ideology. Since neoliberalism emphasises the importance of the market, competition, and deregulation, it is no surprise that the strategies exhibit a similar preference. Growth of GDP (Gross Domestic Product) summarises the goal of most governments and so it is unsurprising that tourism strategies are aligned to achieving this goal, particularly where tourism is a significant contributor to GDP. Hence "Business as usual" (BAU) is an underlying assumption of most of the strategies and New Public Management principles (Paddison & Walmsley, 2018) feature heavily in the strategies reviewed. The invisible hand of this ideology has naturalized and normalized an established version of strategies, so that other versions appear deviant. Occasionally this invisible hand was rendered visible as in the case of **FIJI**. "Particular thanks go to the International Finance Corporation (World Bank Group) for partnering with the Ministry in the finalisation of FT 2021." (8).

However, **MALTA**, **NORWAY**, **and FINLAND** offer examples of mindful strategies that are more socially, environmentally, and culturally focused with the latter reflecting the values of Nordic social democracy. Whilst the main focus is on economic growth, **FINLAND's** strategy is mindful of some of the negative implications of tourism and seeks to address these as part of its strategy. It also emphasises the importance of good governance. **FINLAND** also sees "Improving the sustainability of tourism is a key issue for the future [with] an emphasis on a low-carbon and resource-efficient global economy … and to take into account the social and cultural wellbeing of host residents" (19). More importantly it undertakes to develop techniques to measure and monitor the impacts of tourism including "the calculation of the carbon footprint of the tourism industry at the national level" (56). Domestic tourism and rail transport are also seen as crucial. **NORWAY** seeks to contribute to six of the Sustainable Development Goals through strategic measures and proposed initiatives. Stronger integration of the Sustainable Development Goals and the European Union Green Deal is a feature for **MALTA**, where "Tourism operations will be encouraged and assisted into shifting towards more sustainable approaches to development and operation" (42).

The **BHUTAN** policy is uniquely critical exhibiting a strong emancipatory interest throughout. It has a powerful statement of values based around the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals and a desire to improve people's lives, protect the planet, and manage negative impacts. It also encompasses sound management principles to achieve these although it does lack measurement and monitoring in some areas. Its use of Gross National Happiness rooted in Buddhist philosophy with an emphasis on preservation of culture, equitable development, environmental conservation, and good governance contrasts with the taken for granted goals of most other strategies that are led by Gross National Product. No examples of Marxist strategies were found. This absence reveals that radical engagement with issues of capital accumulation and labour relations has not been evident in the strategies.

*Discourse*

Unseen power is also vested in the authority of authorship and particularly of management consultants who often compile tourism strategies. For example, **KENYA's** blueprint was facilitated by Grant Thornton (a multinational accountancy and consultancy organization) and demonstrates the application of a traditional tourism strategy approach with pages of scientific diagrams and Gantt charts that obscure wider societal concerns. A common template approach is often taken as in the case of **FIJI** which has a detailed strategy with a situational analysis, aims and objectives and an implementation plan. A detailed PESTEL (Political, Environmental, Social, Technological, Economic and Legal) and SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis are a key feature of the **MALTA** strategy. But templates can lead to reproduction where a standard approach is repeated over time, and this militates against any radical innovation or creativity. Strategies that are developed as instrumental documents guided by a technical interest (Habermas, 1978) mean that discursive closure takes place. This includes the discourse of management consultants (their topics of interest), the consultant's gaze (what they look at and what is overlooked) and the disciplining power of the template where a standardised structure and headings (e.g., **KENYA**, **UK**) create a closure against the emergence of critical strategic themes.

*Power*

Analysis of stakeholder power in the consultation phase of the strategies reveals interesting power dynamics (Phi & Dredge, 2019). For example, the **UK** consultation privileged "government and industry [working] in partnership" (6). **CANADA** deployed an Advisory Council consisting of "expert advice" to recommend ways to "increase Canadian tourism opportunities and Canada's competitiveness globally" (7). Similarly, the importance of business stakeholders is highlighted in **SOUTH AFRICA's** strategy: "Tourism is a complex industry which involves a wide range of stakeholders and businesses" (9). It was rare to see genuine consultation beyond business interests and extended to include stakeholders such as locals, trade unions or NGOs representing social and environmental causes. Whilst a New Public Management approach may create efficiency and increase the capacity for collaboration (Beritelli, Bieger, & Laesser, 2007), it can reduce accountability and the extent to which decisions made are in the interests of all relevant stakeholders, particularly local community groups (Paddison & Walmsley, 2018). Two exceptions were **FINLAND**, notable for its consultation with Trade Unions and the **FIJI** strategy which professed extensive consultation. "The Fijian Tourism 2021 (FT 2021) development plan is the culmination of extensive collaboration from government Ministries, our statutory organizations, the private sector, development partners, educational institutions, civil society and foreign missions in Fiji." (8).

*Critical rethinking*

Gibson (2019, pp.12–13) sets a high bar for critical rethinking:

> Previously unthinkable questions now appear pertinent: how might tourists, governments and tour operators be discouraged from their 'obedience to the global tourism industry' (Zimmermann, 2018, p.335)? How can ceaseless growth in aeromobility be justified, especially given that rapid increases in tourism demand are 'outstripping the decarbonisation of tourism-related technology (Lenzen et al., 2018, p.522)?

Could we think of "Low or No-fly tourism"? **NEW ZEALAND** often claims its tourism is "100 % Pure". It suspended international air travel to achieve 100 % freedom from COVID-19. Perhaps a similarly uncompromising response is needed to achieve tourism which is genuinely 100 % Pure.

Bianchi and de Man (2021, p.353) present a significant dilemma for tourism strategy. They contend that the "Sustainable Development Goals-led agenda is contradicted by the logics of growth, competitiveness and profit-making that drive the continued expansion and development of tourism." This points to an alternative agenda of degrowing tourism (Higgins-Desbiolles, Carnicelli, Krolikowski, Wijesinghe, & Boluk, 2019), or at least growing it differently (Sharpley, 2020).

There is also room for greater emphasis on transformation and emancipation. For example, **SOUTH AFRICA's** strategy includes "Ubuntu" in its vision. This roughly translates as shared humanity, but this value and aspiration is overpowered by, and subservient to, the strategy's economic and business imperatives. A critical re-thinking would invert this, trumpeting Ubuntu at the very centre of the strategy. Similarly, **IRELAND's** strategy is entitled "People, Place and Policy Growing Tourism to 2025". Rather than exploiting people and places for the growth of tourism, the strategy could be re-worked to focus on "People, Place, and Policy for Sustainable, Ethical, and Socially Just Tourism."

Finally, Ateljevic (2020, p.468) addresses critical rethinking in a more open way. She cites.

> Charles Eisenstein (n.d.) when he states: 'We don't need smarter solutions. We need different questions'. Indeed, we need to look at the values underlying, pre-existing and exacerbating the [COVID] crisis that may drive us to ask questions like, what do we really want? What does a beautiful life look like? What do we want to leave behind and what do we want to take forward?'

The extraordinary shutting down of the world and its tourism due to COVID-19 surely invited us to re-open it in an innovatively different way.

## Conclusion

The theoretical contributions of this study relate to the three objectives in the introduction. First, a clear understanding of the concept of critical tourism strategy is established through the application of the four domains model. Second, the question of how to operationalise research in critical tourism is addressed by the elaboration of a novel research method and instrument that can be utilized in similar studies. Third, it was discovered that strategies generally operate in a business-as-usual mode, strongly influenced by traditional strategic interests and techniques with an emphasis on growth.

Several points arise from this. First, the negative impacts of tourism growth models adopted were generally overlooked. Second, a pattern of a narrow framing of tourism emerged. It is one that has become normalized so that its shortcomings often go unnoticed. Third, the needs of the tourist were generally privileged over those of the host community. Fourth, critical analysis surfaced crucial omissions and silences. These represent missed opportunities to develop tourism for a better world by identifying and pursuing social, environmental, and cultural objectives. Fifth, where these issues were addressed, they were often expressed as aspirations with soft targets in contrast to the hard targets and performance indicators assigned to deliver business and economic opportunities. Sixth, strategies that include environmental sustainability did not necessarily seek improvements in the social status quo. Seventh, analysis of power, interest and ideology revealed subtle, hidden biases favouring the status quo. Eighth, there was an almost unanimous denial of any climate emergency, exemplified by multiple assumptions that air transport needs to increase. Finally, most of the strategies operate in a Traditional Tourism Strategy mode. The exceptions were **MALTA, FINLAND** and **NORWAY** that exemplify more Mindful Tourism Strategies and **BHUTAN** which represents a paradigm example for the development of Critical Tourism Strategy.

Two limitations are noted. Only strategies in English were analysed. Whilst this still enabled the sampling of strategies from around the world, gaps including South America, China and Russia, exist. Further research would be helpful here. Also, strategies do not always accurately reflect what actually happens. Nevertheless, they are highly influential.

There are several recommendations for management. Business and economic objectives are important for tourism strategy, but there is an opportunity to escape the limitations of Traditional Tourism Strategy techniques. This calls for an understanding of Mindful Tourism Strategy to liberate and widen the consultants' gaze and review the standard templates used for developing strategies. Further, Critical Tourism Strategy can identify ambitious targets for social, environmental, and cultural improvements. But these should not be relegated to soft aspiration. Rather, they should be backed by rigorous implementation techniques with baseline surveys and meticulous monitoring and management. Additionally, tourism strategies should not be developed in a vacuum. They should connect to, rather than

**Table 6**
Template for critical tourism strategy.

| | Action | Benefits | Costs | Target |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| People | | | | |
| Planet | | | | |
| Economy | | | | |

contradict, key national and international policies. Next, photos used to illustrate strategies should avoid stereotypes and illuminate this wider agenda. Strategies must also address tourism and aviation. Current strategies for tourism growth and sustainability are incompatible. The spiralling growth of tourism, aviation and $CO_2$ is implicitly endorsed in most mission statements and its life-threatening impact glossed over in the strategies. This danger must be truthfully recognized and effectively addressed. Strategies would be advised to supplement their mission statement with an emission statement in a move towards genuine engagement with tourism's most pressing issue.

Finally, Table 6 offers a simple template for critical tourism strategy. It examines the costs and benefits of proposed actions, sets systematic targets, and inverts the hierarchy favoured by traditional strategy, by putting the economy at the service of people and the planet.

## CRediT authorship contribution statement

Each author contributed to all parts of the research process.

## Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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