# Implementing Networks of the New Zealand Tourism Strategy 2015

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## Abstract

The areas of tourism planning and strategy are frequently at the focus of academic enquiry; however, the implementation of the planning results is not. The small number of existing studies suggests that many difficulties associated with plan or strategy implementation in tourism are related to stakeholders, their interrelationships and behaviour. They include rivalry/ competition between actors, individuals or organisations, the stability of stakeholder relationships, the distribution of information and, accordingly, communication gaps and feared or perceived loss of autonomy in cooperative structures. Dislikes between individuals that may result in altered involvement or performance of an organisation were found to be prevalent at the local and community levels. Other known challenges in the implementation of plans include cost and time constraints as well as red tape. This study aims to reduce the knowledge gap related to plan or strategy implementation in tourism by investigating stakeholder involvement and relationships in implementation processes. Taking a network approach, it investigates stakeholder interaction and collaboration in the implementation of the current national tourism strategy, the New Zealand Tourism Strategy (NZTS) 2015.

The New Zealand Tourism Strategy 2015 declares a destination vision and desired outcomes for tourism in New Zealand that have an effect on the country's whole tourism sector. While the strategy document is situated at the national level of destination planning, achieving its outcomes requires the input and collaboration of a large number of stakeholders from the public and private sectors and at all levels of government. Indeed, the NZTS 2015 acknowledges that its implementation "will require all stakeholders to play a part" (Ministry of Tourism 2007, p. 7). As challenges in strategy implementation are considered to increase in environments that involve a large number of stakeholders, associated difficulties in putting the NZTS 2015 into practice are possible. The strategy document has been released three years ago; the timing of this research is therefore such that implementation networks can be assumed to exist.

This project examines the implementation of the NZTS 2015. Focussing on stakeholders and the networks they act in, this project investigates which actors have a role in and contribute to strategy implementation, how they interact in order to achieve strategy implementation and how intensive their collaboration is. In order to elucidate stakeholder relationships, this study employs a

pragmatic mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative and qualitative methods. A pragmatic epistemology allows the researcher to focus on the research problem as the most significant determinant of research techniques. As Patton (2002, p. 72) puts it, "the point is to do what makes sense, report fully on what was done, why it was done, and what the implications are for findings".

A quantitative social network analysis (SNA) permits the application of a variety of methodical tools; it is used to examine the significance and intensity of stakeholder relationships. The results of the SNA (using Ucinet 6 software) conducted for this project express actor relations in terms of relational concepts or processes. Questionnaires were posted to all organisations that, according to the New Zealand Tourism Strategy 2015, have a role in strategy implementation. These questionnaires focus on the identification of collaboration partners, the content, direction and intensity of the collaboration.

In addition, qualitative semi-structured interviews are conducted with key stakeholders of both the preparation and implementation of the strategy document. These include government organisations at both the regional and national levels, relevant industry associations and the national destination marketing organisation. There will be three types of interview questions, contextual, diagnostic and evaluative. The first category of questions addresses the structure and nature of the strategy environment thus allowing for an exploration and understanding of the network actors as well as its context. Diagnostic questions address reasons for the (current and previous) state(s) of the strategy environment and stakeholder networks within it whereas evaluative questions aim to assess prevalent collaboration practices in the network(s) identified as well as outputs and outcomes of alliances and relationships. Inductive coding is applied to analyse the qualitative data gathered during interviews.

This paper aims to contribute to our knowledge on tourism strategy implementation by adding a stakeholder network perspective on national tourism strategy. Results are of both quantitative and qualitative nature. Alongside graphical expressions of existing stakeholder networks, an outcome of the qualitative analysis of the questionnaires, qualitative results will provide further insights into stakeholder networks and the intensity of relationships between actors involved with strategy implementation at the national level of destination planning.

## References

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