

# Research supporting policy making in tourism



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**Outline the key requirements for good research and identify how research might support policy-making.**

Research, defined as a broad range of processes designed to provide policy makers and managers with information that is objective, reliable and as reproducible as possible (Bull, 1999) is a vital business tool used to support policy makers in making decisions. Page (2003) also suggests that tourism policy-making is inherently a political activity, affected by the formal structure of government. A wide range of forces affects policy making, and policy does not exist in a vacuum, because various agencies exist to implement it. Drew (1980) suggests that research is conducted to solve problems and to expand knowledge, and stresses that research is a systematic way of asking questions, a systematic method of enquiry (taken from Bell, 1999).

As previously mentioned, policy making is a fundamental business tool, however it must be noted that undertaking research is also a very expensive, time consuming and complex task and researchers must be able to select the right information to avoid further implications. Research activity supports policy-making in a number of ways. First of all if a company is deciding to open a new site in a different country for example, they will need to know who their competitors are, how accessible is the place, where will the labour come from, what impact will this have on the locals? How safe is the area? How will the marketing and advertising be conducted to ensure its success? It is clear from this simple example how complicated and time consuming information gathering can be. Primary data, secondary data, or both may be used in a research investigation. Primary data is original data gathered for a specific purpose as for example interviewing the local community, while <https://assignbuster.com/research-supporting-policy-making-in-tourism/>

secondary data is data that has already been collated for similar purposes, i. e. crime statistics. Data here, could be collected either through quantitative, therefore utilising a positivist approach, or qualitative methods therefore adopting a phenomenological approach. Policy makers will need to know whether that policy is going to be successful, politically/legally/ethnically acceptable, the costs involved, the number of staff needed to implement that policy and whether it fits with the wants, needs and aspirations of the people directed at (Ritchie and Goeldner, 1994).

Taking into consideration the fact that research can be an expensive and time consuming task and that this may make or break policy decisions, some key requirements for good research have been identified. Bell (1999) suggests that the following are to be considered as key requirements for good research to be conducted: the utility of data, therefore the data that can be used, the cost-effectiveness whereby benefits must be greater than costs; timeliness therefore data that will be there when needed; accuracy , data will need to be accurate; and finally whatever procedure for collecting data is selected, it should always be examined critically to assess to what extent it is likely to be reliable. Reliability is the extent to which a procedure provides similar results under constant conditions on all occasion, however due to the nature of tourism this is not always the case.

Three policies examples will now be provided to show how research generated the information that was needed to make those policy decisions. The first policy considered is that of Stonehenge. As suggested by Chris Blandford Associates (2000) this World Heritage Site survived for thousands of years and not so long ago two roads were introduced into the landscape, <https://assignbuster.com/research-supporting-policy-making-in-tourism/>

bringing with them ever increasing traffic and serious environmental problems. Government's proposal to close the A344 and to place the A303 in a 2 Kilometre tunnel where it passes the stone has raised many arguments. The policy for Stonehenge all started with the vision to save this site from environmental degradation and placing it back in its original and unique settings, by eliminating the impact on the environment made by the noise and sight of traffic. The way in which this could be achieved was by closing one road, the A344, and introducing a two kilometre tunnel. It is important to stress that the decision of policy makers to close the road and introduce the tunnel to solve the problem, has not been decided overnight, but has been the result of extensive study and consultation since 1991, and alternative ways have been considered prior to the decision.

Between 1991 and 1993 other 50 possible routes were considered. At this stage researchers decided to gather primary data, by means of a panel, from local bodies and organisations in order to have their views on the matter. Each representative gave their own view, and during the process all the possible alternatives were considered and discussed. A Public Consultation was held in April 1993, whereby four routes were put forward as a possible solution to the problem. In 1994 two national bodies organised a one-day international to debate solutions for both a road improvement and a new visitor centre for Stonehenge (Chris Blandford Associates, 2000). A Public Exhibition was held in September 1995 and a Planning Conference followed in November 1995 to understand publics and other interested organisation's perceptions and ideas of the proposal. A further public consultation was held in 1999, and once again households in the vicinity were consulted (Chris

Blandford Associates, 2000). In November 2000, the Highway Agency conducted primary research to gather qualitative and quantitative data by means of desk study and field