

**The Role of Stakeholder Participation
in Tourism Planning in Oman**



Ahmed Sulaiman Khalfan Al Mahrizi

A thesis submitted for the award of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Natural and Environmental Sciences

Newcastle University

United Kingdom

March 2021

Abstract

While stakeholder participation is recognised as an important element in sustainable tourism development, research on its applicability within different political and socio-cultural contexts is still evolving. This thesis examines the applicability of the democratic concept of stakeholder participation, to tourism planning efforts in the Sultanate of Oman, a non-democratic and emerging tourism destination. In doing so, it seeks to understand how stakeholder participation can contribute to tourism planning in the Omani context. This study is rooted in the constructivist epistemology and followed a qualitative methodology that included analysis of planning documents, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with different tourism stakeholders. Tourism planning documents and stakeholder discourse are analysed to understand the challenges in the current planning process and the perspectives of tourism stakeholders on strengthening stakeholder participation to ensure sustainable tourism development.

The findings reveal that the current system of planning in Oman is characterised by decision-making power vested at the very top of the government hierarchy. All planning decisions are made by the government with bigger companies and experts providing input. The system has several weaknesses as perceived by stakeholders, including, a lack of clear direction for the tourism sector, fragmented decision-making, and lack of coordination among government stakeholders leading to delays in implementation. Stakeholders' discourse reveals enthusiasm for more stakeholder participation as an effective mechanism to address the weaknesses, reduce community resistance to tourism and to ensure effective longer-term tourism development. However, in contrast to existing typologies of stakeholder participation, non-government stakeholders in Oman do not see themselves as part of the decision-making process; rather they emphasise that the government should make the ultimate decisions, which these should be based on stakeholder recommendations. The main contribution of this thesis is that it builds on and extends the existing typologies of stakeholder participation and stages of tourism planning by proposing an integrated framework for tourism planning and stakeholder consultation that is contextualised for Oman. The framework provides solutions that addresses the weaknesses in the Omani tourism planning system and can reduce community resistance to tourism development efforts. The framework has the potential to be applied in other non-democratic countries, which share similarities with Oman, but this is subject to validation from future research.

Acknowledgements

This is to acknowledge my appreciation for the valuable thoughts and guidance of my current supervisors, Professor Tim Gray and Professor Diana Gregory-Smith and my former supervisor, Professor Selina Stead for their guidance and support. Appreciation for help in completing this research extends beyond living people to the souls of my beloved parents who provided the first environment for my critical thinking. I am very thankful to my wife Zainab, and my sons Mohammed and Zayid who provided me the space and atmosphere for me to work relentlessly. My gratitude to my friends, namely, Dr. Shoba Zachariah for her guidance in approaching my thesis more critically, Dr. Hadi Alsamadani for his advice as well as Mohammed, Talal and Ahmed who cheered me up and helped me preserve my smile at difficult times.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	iv
List of Tables	xi
List of Figures.....	xii
Glossary	xiii
Abbreviations	xiv
Chapter 1. Introduction.....	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Rationale and Significance of this Study.....	3
1.3 Background of the Study	4
1.4 Aim and Objectives of the Study.....	8
1.5 Anticipated Contribution of this Study.....	8
1.6 Thesis Structure	10
Chapter 2. Literature Review.....	12
2.1 Introduction	12
2.2 Tourism Impact.....	12
2.3 Theoretical Framework of Tourism Planning and Implementation.....	14
2.4 Approaches to Tourism Planning	18
2.4.1 Planning and Stakeholder Participation.....	20
2.4.2 Evidence-Based Policy	22
2.5 Contemporary Stakeholder Theory.....	23
2.5.1 Tourism Stakeholders	24
2.5.2 The Rationale for Stakeholder Participation in Tourism Planning	25
2.5.3 Stakeholder Power	28
2.6 Extent of Stakeholder Participation.....	30
2.6.1 Public and Local Community Participation.....	31
2.6.2 Collaborative Planning	36
2.7 Issues and Challenges of Stakeholder Participation	37
2.7.1 Limited Participation by Stakeholders.....	37
2.7.2 Structure of Stakeholder Participation.....	39
2.7.3 Practical Constraints Versus Inclusiveness	39
2.8 Stakeholder Participation in Developing Countries.....	40
2.9 Tourism Planning in Non-Democratic Developing Countries	42
2.10 Oman: An Emerging Tourism Destination.....	44
2.11 The Concept of Stakeholder Participation in Oman	48
2.12 Conclusion.....	52
Chapter 3. Methodology	54

3.1	Introduction	54
3.2	Philosophical Stance	54
3.3	Research Aim and Objectives	56
3.4	Research Design.....	57
3.5	Geographical Location of the Study.....	59
3.6	Sampling Strategy	60
3.6.1	Stakeholders and Participants.....	62
3.7	Data Collection Methods.....	64
3.7.1	Government Planning Documents.....	64
3.7.2	Pre-testing Phase	66
3.7.3	Key Informant (KI) Interviews.....	66
3.7.4	Focus Group Discussions	70
3.7.5	Problems Encountered in Field Work	72
3.8	Ethical Considerations.....	74
3.9	Critical Discourse Analysis.....	74
3.10	Application of CDA in this Study	77
3.10.1	Transcription and Coding.....	79
3.10.2	Discourse Strands or Theme Generation.....	80
3.10.3	Techniques Used for Critical Discourse Analysis.....	83
3.11	Issues of Validity and Reliability	87
3.12	Conclusion.....	89
Chapter 4. Analysis of National Planning Documents.....		90
4.1	Introduction	90
4.2	Oman Vision 2020: Overview.....	90
4.3	Stakeholders Identified in Oman Vision 2020	91
4.3.1	Control of Planning vs ‘Unanimity’ of Outcomes	93
4.4	Oman Tourisms Strategy (OTS) 2040: Overview.....	97
4.5	General Presentation of OTS 2040.....	98
4.6	The Stakeholders in OTS 2040	99
4.6.1	Key Stakeholders.....	100
4.7	Stakeholder Participation in Developing OTS 2040	103
4.8	Stakeholders Not Included in the Development of OTS 2040	106
4.9	Expert Stakeholders.....	107
4.10	The Future Role of Stakeholders as Recommended in OTS 2040	109
4.10.1	The Role of the Government.....	109
4.10.2	The Role of the Private Sector	111
4.10.3	Local Community Role: Passive Recipient Stakeholders	112

4.10.4	The Media as a Mere Marketing Tool	114
4.10.5	The Ambiguity in the Role of Academia.....	115
4.10.6	Main Stakeholders for the Implementation of OTS 2040.....	117
4.11	Stakeholder Power in OTS 2040	118
4.12	Conclusion.....	120
Chapter 5. Results of Key Informant Interviews		121
5.1	Introduction	121
5.2	The Perceived Benefits of Tourism	121
5.2.1	Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities.....	122
5.2.2	Lack of Benefits for Some Stakeholders	125
5.2.3	Non-Economic Benefits	126
5.3	Perceived Risks of Tourism.....	126
5.3.1	Environmental Concerns	126
5.3.2	Impact on the Local Culture	132
5.3.3	A Selective Tourism Strategy for Lower Risk	134
5.3.4	Security Concerns.....	137
5.4	Perception of Tourism Planning in Oman	139
5.4.1	Lack of Clear Direction	140
5.4.2	Lack of Adequate Government Expertise.....	142
5.4.3	Fragmented Decision-making.....	145
5.4.4	Slow Implementation of Decisions and Tourism Projects.....	152
5.4.5	Lack of Funding for Tourism Projects.....	156
5.5	Current Stakeholder Participation in Tourism Planning.....	159
5.5.1	Selection of Stakeholders	159
5.5.2	Stakeholder Power.....	163
5.5.3	Stakeholder Participation and Decision-Making	167
5.6	Stakeholder Participation in OTS 2040	170
5.7	More vs Less Stakeholder Participation	177
5.8	Stakeholder Motives for Participation	181
5.9	Key Stakeholders in Tourism Planning	184
5.10	Stakeholder Consultation vs Stakeholder Decision-Making	190
5.11	Conclusion.....	192
Chapter 6. Results of Focus Group Discussions.....		194
6.1	Introduction	194
6.2	Process I.....	195
6.3	Process II	196
6.4	Recognition of Process I.....	198

6.5	Top-Down Hierarchy	199
6.6	Stakeholder Inclusiveness	203
6.7	The Central Role of Consultants in Planning	206
6.8	Length of the Planning Process	209
6.9	Legislation and Decision-Making Power	212
6.10	Conclusion.....	216
Chapter 7. Discussion and Proposal for An Integrated Framework for Tourism Planning and Stakeholder Participation		218
7.1	Introduction	218
7.2	Top-Down Planning Approach and Centralised Decision-Making.....	219
7.3	Bureaucracy and Fragmented Decision-making	221
7.4	Focus on Economic Gains	223
7.5	Economic Gains vs Adverse Tourism Impacts	225
7.6	Expert Power	230
7.7	Local Community Perceptions	232
7.8	Stakeholder Consultation not Decision-Making	235
7.9	A Framework for Tourism Planning and Stakeholder Consultation for Non-Democratic Countries 238	
7.9.1	Theoretical Framework	238
7.9.2	A Central Body for Tourism Planning	239
7.9.3	Stage 1: Setting Goals and Priorities	242
7.9.4	Stage 2a: Situation Appraisal: Current Performance.....	242
7.9.5	Stage 2b: Situation Appraisal: Macro Environmental Analysis.....	243
7.9.6	Stage 3: Stakeholder Consultation Plan	243
7.9.7	Stage 4: Public Awareness Programme.....	247
7.9.8	Stage 5: Stakeholder Consultation	248
7.9.9	Stage 6: Feedback to Stakeholders.....	249
7.9.10	Stage 7: Development of the Plan	250
7.9.11	Stage 8: Implementation and Monitoring.....	250
7.9.12	Overall comments on the FTPSC.....	252
7.10	Conclusion.....	255
Chapter 8. Conclusion.....		257
8.1	Introduction	257
8.2	Summary of Findings	257
8.2.1	Objective 1	257
8.2.2	Objective 2	259
8.2.3	Objective 3	260
8.3	Thesis Contributions	262

8.4	Limitations and Future Research Avenues	265
8.5	Overall Conclusions	266
	References	267
	Appendices	288
	A. Interview transcript.....	288
	B. Information Letter and Consent Form for Invitation to be interviewed.....	298
	C. Consent form.....	300
	D. Generation of Initial Discourse Strands of the KI Interviews	302
	E. Final Discourse Strands	306
	G. FGD Discourse Strands	307

List of Tables

Table Number	Title	Page Number
1	Stages in Tourism Planning Process	18
2	Public Participation Typologies/Frameworks for Tourism Planning	34
3	Stages of the Research Data Collection Process	59
4	Participant Sample Size by Method of Data Collection and Location	61
5	Number of Participants from Each Stakeholder Category	64
6	Participant Sample Size for Key Informant Interviews	69
7	Stage 2: Participant Sample Size for Focus Group Discussions	71
8	Data Analysis Methods and Techniques	86-87
9	FTPSC Stakeholder Categories and Groups	245-246

List of Figures

Figure Number	Figure name	Page number
1	Stakeholders Interviewed for OTS 2040	104
2	Stakeholders in Focus Groups	106
3	Expert Sessions	108
4	Stakeholders for Implementation	117
5	Road Map for Implementation	118
6	Stakeholder Perceptions of Tourism Planning in Oman	158
7	Process I: Planning and Stakeholders Engagement Process for OTS 2040	195
8	Tourism Planning Process II	197-198
9	An Integrated Framework for Tourism Planning & Stakeholder Consultation	254

Glossary

Ashura	Consultation
Alim	Scholar/religious scholars
Ibadhi	An Islamic doctrine
Majlis	Council
Sheiks	Tribal Heads
Souqs	Traditional Markets
Wadis	Valleys
Wali(s)	Ruler's representatives in Regions
Willayat(s)	Regions within governorates

Abbreviations

CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
FGD	Focus Group
FTPSC	Framework for Tourism Planning and Stakeholder Consultation
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Countries
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GO	Government Official
KI	Key Informative
LCM	A Local Community Member
LCP	Local Community Participation
MCM	Municipal Council Community member
MICE	Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions tourism segment
MoE	Ministry of Environment
MoEc.	Ministry of Economy
MoH	Ministry of Housing
MoT	Ministry of Tourism
MoTT	Ministry of Transport and Telecommunication
MS	A Media Stakeholder (includes both private and Government)
NGO	A Non-Government Organisation
OTS	Oman Tourism Strategy 2040
PFI	Pension Fund Investor
PPF	Public Participation Framework
PVS	A Private Sector Stakeholder
SCP	Supreme Council of Planning
SGCS	Semi Government Company Stakeholder
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
TA	Tourism Academic
TANFEED	The Oman national programme for enhancing economic diversification

THR	The consultancy tourism company that developed Oman Tourism Strategy 2040
UNWTO	United Nation World Tourism Organisation

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Tourism is a key driver of economic and social development in many developed and developing countries. The economic benefits of tourism can be significant and include increasing foreign exchange earnings, government tax revenue, employment opportunities as well as the overall development of destinations (Cao, 2015). As a result of the tourism industry's ability to generate economic growth, it is increasingly seen as a panacea for economic and socio-cultural problems in many countries (Hatipoglu et al. 2016).

However, in many host destinations, tourism has not lived up to the “hype” about its potential for economic and social development. The level of economic benefits has often been low and the society and the environment have been adversely impacted by unsustainable and unplanned growth of tourism (Hatipoglu et al. 2016; Wang et al. 2019; Wanner and Pröbstl-Haider, 2019). It is now recognised that if tourism is not well planned, it can lead to degradation in social, economic, and environmental sustainability (Byrd, 2007; Adu-Ampong, 2017; Andriotis et al. 2018). Careful planning is also necessary to enable different sections of society to enjoy the benefits from tourism while protecting them against potential risks. Furthermore, in comparison to other industries, tourism relies on multiple economic sectors, products and services which makes deliberate and cohesive planning and implementation much more critical. As tourism development requires input from a wide range of economic sectors, issues in coordination between government entities themselves as well as with private and not-for-profit sectors, can ultimately affect the attractiveness of the tourism product and the viability of the sector. (Hall, 2011; Dredge and Jamal, 2015). There is ample evidence in the literature that the lack of planning or inadequate planning presents the most significant threat to the longer-term sustainability of tourism in host destinations (Pjerotić et al. 2016; Lin and Simmons, 2017; Var and Gun, 2020).

Until the early part of the 21st century, tourism planning was seen either as a top-down, expert-led process under the direction of national governments or as a matter for the private sector (Moscardo, 2011). Buckley (2012) notes that most tourism-related organisations focus mainly on profits thereby making the tourism sector far from being sustainable unless there is appropriate regulatory change to drive the adoption of sustainable practices. The UNWTO asserts that sustainable tourism development must consider “the current and future economic,

social and environmental impacts” resulting from tourism development (Perkumienė et al. 2019, p.10). Hence, sustainability requires attention not just to current but also to potential future impacts of tourism development which can often be difficult to estimate or identify. As tourism is inherently a resource-intensive industry, sustainable tourism development must consider the sustainable use of social, cultural, and natural resources including the environment. Sustainability is complex and may mean different things to different people given the inherent variations between destinations and can be a difficult concept to implement or measure (Murphy and Price, 2005; Buckley, 2012). Thus, proponents of sustainable tourism development advocate stakeholder participation in tourism planning and development decisions to address the diverse impacts of tourism (Lin and Simmons, 2017; Waligo et al. 2015), where a stakeholder is any group or individual that can be affected directly or indirectly by tourism activities (Karl, 2007). The stakeholder concept has its roots in organisational management theory which posits that an organisation requires the support of all its stakeholders including internal and external stakeholder groups for long-term success.

Although the composition of stakeholders may vary in the details according to contexts, there is widespread agreement that stakeholders will impact tourism initiatives significantly and in multiple ways (Waligo et al. 2013). Moreover, to enhance the success of tourism initiatives the active involvement of relevant stakeholders including the public or local community in the tourism planning process is required, as opposed to them being mere recipients of development plans (Sharpley, 2002; Al-Shaabi, 2011; Florida, 2013; Wanner and Pröbstl-Haider, 2019). Public participation in tourism planning has been increasingly sought to enhance sustainability as such participation is likely to result in more appropriate decisions and better outcomes (Bramwell and Lane, 2000; Tosun, 2005; Beeton, 2006; Marzuki et al. 2012; Wanner and Pröbstl-Haider, 2019).

Although stakeholder participation evolved as a means to address specific negative impacts of tourism, it is now considered essential to sustainable tourism development. However, there are also criticisms of stakeholder participation in planning and decision making, such as the inherent costs and time required for stakeholder engagement leading to delayed decision making (Choi and Murray, 2010; Moscardo, 2008). Other criticisms point out that wider stakeholder participation is limited by factors such as low levels of education or awareness of stakeholders, poor language proficiency, and political, social, or economic inequalities

(Uzar, 2007), all of which can make stakeholder representation and participation difficult to implement. Nevertheless, there is considerable consensus in the literature on the importance of stakeholder participation as a vital tool in tourism planning (Keogh, 1990; Maiden, 2008; Wanner and Pröbstl-Haider, 2019).

1.2 Rationale and Significance of this Study

The concept of stakeholder participation has its roots in democratic traditions of public participation in decision making; as noted by Fiorino (1990), democracy is the basis for stakeholder participation. However, the evidence indicates that effective and inclusive stakeholder participation may be practically difficult to implement even in democratic countries due to differences in contexts between destinations, time needed for participation and power differentials among stakeholders. Moreover, stakeholder participation in tourism is required not just to balance the positive and adverse tourism impacts but also to ensure an appropriate response to the diverse national and global factors and systems which affect tourism itself (Teo, 2002). Hence, its implementation in developing countries, many of which have top-down planning systems, is still very much a work in progress. While several studies have reviewed stakeholder participation in a range of developed and developing countries (Bramwell, 2015), many of these studies found that not all relevant tourism stakeholders were included in the participation process, particularly in countries where governments employ a top-down decision-making approach (Lin and Simmons, 2017).

Most studies on stakeholder participation in tourism planning have examined local community participation in specific tourism projects or destinations and therefore may not apply to a country's national level of planning. Pooyan et al. (2019) note that there are gaps in the literature on sustainable tourism development and further refinement of holistic models is required. Such refinements and investigations are particularly important in the developing world especially where the systems are mostly 'top-down' (Alshboul, 2016). However, according to Adu-Ampong (2017) there is a dearth of studies on collaborative stakeholder participation that enable a holist view of the different stakeholders in developing countries, and so it is important to study how developing countries conduct stakeholder participation and how much consultation is needed in these countries. Authors such as Ying et al. (2015) and Adu-Ampong (2017), also notes that there is a need for further investigation of different ways to involve stakeholders in tourism planning in new and emerging destinations, especially those that follow different economic and political systems.

The obvious conclusion is that one size does not fit all when it comes to stakeholder participation in tourism development planning. There is to date limited research on stakeholder participation in tourism planning in countries that follow non-participative or non-democratic political systems. This study seeks to fill this gap, by examining how stakeholder participation in tourism planning can be implemented within a non-democratic and monarchical political governance system such as in Oman. In so doing, it adds to the literature on how tourism planning and stakeholder participation models and approaches can be contextualised to countries with different political systems.

The practical application of the stakeholder participation concept becomes even more difficult in developing countries that follow non-democratic political or governance systems. The notion of involving non-government stakeholders in planning and implementation decisions may be considered off-limits or inappropriate in monarchies that do not have democratic governance systems such as the Arab countries in the Middle East. This study, therefore, examines how the concept of stakeholder participation in tourism planning efforts is perceived by stakeholders themselves in the Sultanate of Oman as an example of a non-democratic country, and how it could be integrated within the tourism planning process so that planning initiatives are successful and sustainable.

As Lyon (2013) argues, the complex systems within which tourism operates, with its myriad components and interactions, require different stakeholder views, values and perceptions to be aligned to these components. However, he notes that there is a dearth of studies that examine the views of multiple stakeholder as the majority of studies focus on either one or two sets of stakeholders (which may include tourists, residents, entrepreneurs and local government) within each study. This study, by examining the discourse of multiple stakeholders concerning their perceptions of participation in the tourism planning system, will be one of the few studies that provides an integrated, comparative look into a variety of stakeholder views and perspectives.

1.3 Background of the Study

The Sultanate of Oman is an emerging tourism destination which aspires to develop its tourism potential thereby reducing its dependence on oil revenues for economic growth and development. For more than two decades, Oman's oil revenues have been declining due to the fall in international oil prices and the government has been reporting deficit budgets

(Haque et al. 2016). In the 1980s, the Omaani government identified tourism as a key sector for economic diversification as it offers tremendous potential for business opportunities (Ministry of National Economy, 2007). By 2040, tourism is expected to contribute 7.4% of the GDP of Oman compared to the current 2.5% (THR, 2016; NCSI, 2019). Oman is expected to be the fastest growing tourism destination in the Middle East and this is reflected in the development of new tourism infrastructures and tourism products in the country (Aulia and Almandhari, 2015), as well as an increase in the presence of international tourism investors in the hotel industry (Aulia and Almandhari, 2015). Several new international hotels and resorts and integrated tourism complexes have been developed during the last few years.

However, despite these initiatives and the government's stated enthusiasm for developing the tourism sector, a government report (TANFEED, 2017, p. 80) states that Oman has not been able to leverage the expected returns from its natural tourism resources. Such resources include topographical and geographical elements such as its mountains, caves, sand dunes, beaches, islands, water springs, geological and archaeological sites, its wildlife and marine life, as well as socio-cultural elements such as world heritage sites, mosques, castles, forts, traditional markets, and ways of life (Al-Hashim, 2015). Oman also has a strategic location being close to three continents, Asia, Africa and Europe. TANFEED (2017, p. 80) highlights obstacles to tourism development including strict visa regulations, unavailability of hotel rooms, low performance of air transport, limited infrastructure links between air and land destinations and shortage of expertise and qualified staff in tourism. To address the lack of effectiveness of its tourism development efforts, the Ministry of Tourism (MoT) initiated the Oman Tourism Strategy (OTS) 2040, which was undertaken by a team of consultants from the international consultancy firm, THR in 2016. Considerable effort went into the preparation of OTS 2040, the process of which included some elements of stakeholder participation; however, the strategy has yet to be implemented or fully approved by the Omani government at the top of the hierarchy.

Being a constitutional monarchy, ultimate decision-making power in Oman rests essentially with his Majesty the Sultan and through him to government officials appointed by him. The next level of the formal decision-making hierarchy is the Ministerial Council and includes all Ministers. The State Council which consists of members selected by His Majesty, and the Ashura Council established in 1991 with publicly elected representatives, together form the Oman Council. The Oman Council is itself headed by His Majesty and has mainly an

advisory role. The unrest popularly referred to as the Arab Spring of 2011, although not very disruptive in Oman, did push the government to give more power to all elected councils such as the Ashura and municipal councils to influence decisions, based on demands by demonstrators for more participation in decision-making (Kumar, 2017).

According to researchers such as Al-Masroori (2006), Al-Amri (2008) and Al-Shaabi (2011), if tourism development initiatives are to be successful in sustainably yielding the expected benefits, Oman's tourism planning process must integrate a sufficient level of stakeholder participation that enables optimal decisions. Winkler (2007), notes that the government delayed its decision to develop its tourism sector in the 1980s and the 1990s due to two reasons: first, because the physical infrastructure was not in place and second, because Omanis were not prepared to open up the country to tourists due to their fear of harming their culture and local identity. The latter factor indicates that there is probably resistance to particular tourism development initiatives from the public and local communities which can slow down the development process. Al-Amri (2008) observes that compared to its neighbouring countries in the Middle East, the Sultanate of Oman has unique cultural and geographical attractions and to protect and reflect this uniqueness, the community must be involved in crafting tourism planning policies. OTS 2040 also states that Oman's tourism industry must be sensitive to the needs of residents to ensure that tourism development is consistent with the unique Omani culture and is sustainable in the longer term economically, environmentally, and socio-culturally. According to Al-Masroori (2006), this can only happen if all tourism industry stakeholders (i.e., government, developers and local-residents) collaborate in policy formulation, implementation and monitoring.

Publications on stakeholder participation in tourism planning in Oman is almost non-existent. Research into tourism in Oman is relatively new and given the scant amount of available research studies, the gap is beginning to receive increasing attention. Winckler (2007) investigated the reasons that prompted Oman to reverse its negative stance towards tourism and enter the tourism market in the 1990s. The one study on stakeholder participation in tourism development is a PhD thesis by Al-Shaabi (2011) which explores the participation of local residents in the development of an integrated tourism complex called 'The Wave' in Oman. His study finds that there was no local community participation in the project, and he proposes a theoretical model to promote local community participation in tourism projects. Moreover, Al-Shaabi's study considered only local community participation within a single

project and did not seek to examine participation by other stakeholders. Henderson (2015) presents a comparative case study of Oman and Qatar in terms of tourism destination development and their underlying dynamics by reviewing public reports and documents relating to the two countries. She notes that both countries have been neglected in terms of tourism research and warrant further attention given the apparently untapped potential. A doctoral study by Al-Masroori (2006) explored Oman's competitiveness as a tourist destination by examining the interrelationships between destination-specific situational factors, community participation and community attachment and their impact on the development of Oman's tourism resources and attractions. Feighery (2012) conducted a critical discourse analysis of Oman's tourism promotional film 'Welcome to My Country', to determine the extent to which occidental scripting persists in official representations of Arab States. Other studies such as that of Oukil et al. (2016), who conducted an empirical analysis of the Omani hotel industry performance, and Al-Subhi (2017), who investigated the likelihood of achieving the objectives stated in Oman's Strategic Fisheries Plan (2013-2020) for his PhD thesis, are not directly related to tourism. There is no study to date which has examined stakeholder participation constraints and challenges in tourism planning and implementation in Oman with its top-down decision-making systems, given the multi-sectoral nature of the tourism industry which requires a collaborative and unified approach.

Because of the significant political, social and cultural differences between Oman and developed, democratic or developing countries, there are several elements that are unique to the country that must be considered to make the planning and participation process more relevant. Also, considering the possible public resistance to tourism development in Oman based on a desire to protect local culture and values (Winkler, 2007; Bontenbal and Aziz, 2013), it is important to consider how the public and local communities can be involved in the planning and implementation process to reduce resistance and potential conflicts. As emphasised by Li (2006), stakeholder participation systems do not have to be identical in all countries but need to reflect the local systems and respond to local challenges. It cannot be taken for granted that because a particular stakeholder participation approach works in some places, it will work everywhere (Kessler, 2004).

Thus, there is a gap in both theory and practice when it comes to tourism planning and stakeholder participation approaches which are applicable to an emerging non-democratic destination such as Oman.

1.4 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this thesis is:

To examine critically the applicability of stakeholder participation in tourism planning efforts in a non-democratic and emerging tourism destination, namely, the Sultanate of Oman in order to strengthen sustainable tourism development.

The study seeks to achieve this aim by examining tourism planning documents and the perspectives of the different tourism stakeholders on the current planning process and the appropriateness and scope for stakeholder participation in tourism planning in Oman. The following research objectives have thus been identified:

- **Objective 1:** To identify the weaknesses and challenges in the current tourism planning process in Oman.
- **Objective 2:** To analyse stakeholder perspectives on a participative and inclusive approach to tourism planning and development in Oman.
- **Objective 3:** To develop an integrated framework for tourism planning and stakeholder participation for Oman that addresses identified weakness and strengthens sustainability.

By developing a planning framework that strengthens stakeholder participation while addressing systemic weaknesses in sustainable tourism planning in Oman, this study will add to the literature on how stakeholder participation can be applied in emerging destinations that do not follow democratic systems of governance. Oman is chosen as a case study and data were collected from different tourism stakeholders including government officials, private sector tourism organisations, investors, community leaders and representatives, NGOs, academics, and journalists.

1.5 Anticipated Contribution of this Study

This study attempts to understand the views and perspectives of different tourism stakeholders in order to strengthen the process of tourism planning in the Sultanate of Oman. By doing so, the key contributions from this study are in the following three areas:

Theoretical Contribution: If tourism development is expected to help emerging destinations such as Oman diversify their economies, the link between tourism planning,

stakeholder participation and sustainable tourism development requires further attention so that results are balanced and optimised. The literature makes it clear that approaches to both tourism planning and stakeholder participation that have worked elsewhere will not necessarily work in other places with different economic, political, or cultural systems (Alshboul, 2016; Adu-Ampong, 2017; Pooyan et al. 2019). To provide anticipated outcomes, participation approaches must reflect and address the challenges of particular locations including differences in power structures, conflicting interests and knowledge and awareness of different stakeholders in those locations (Jordan et al. 2013; Saito and Ruhanen, 2017; Adu-Ampong, 2017). By examining Omani stakeholders' perspectives and views, this thesis provides an understanding of the problems and challenges faced in tourism planning and stakeholder participation at a national level in non-democratic countries where most decisions are taken at the very top of the hierarchy.

As far as the researcher is aware, there are no studies that have examined the applicability of the democratic concept of stakeholder participation in tourism planning to non-democratic countries. Thus, this thesis adds to our understanding of the perspectives of different stakeholder on the appropriateness and extent of stakeholder participation that is relevant in such countries. In doing so, it contributes specifically to the literature by synthesising and extending existing planning and participation models and the views of tourism stakeholders into a conceptual framework that integrates stakeholder participation in tourism planning at national, regional, and local levels in a non-democratic country.

Case-Study Knowledge: Given Oman's comparatively late entry into the tourism market, research on Oman as a tourist destination and the planning processes is quite limited (Albalushi and Wise, 2017; Scholz. 2018). There is, however, increasing interest in the tourism potential of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states in terms of their competitiveness and tourism development efforts as these countries are striving to enhance their competitiveness and reduce their current levels of dependence on oil revenues (Albalushi and Wise, 2017). The political governance and decision-making system in these countries are similar in that they are all monarchies with centralised systems of decision-making which are directed or controlled by the very top of the hierarchy. This thesis adds to the slowly increasing body of knowledge of this region and Oman in particular, by providing a critical review of the challenges involved in tourism planning and stakeholder participation at a national level.

Practical Contribution: This study offers significant practical value to government decision-makers in Oman. Given Oman's stated intention to develop its tourism potential and diversify sources of national revenues (Belwal and Belwal, 2010; Henderson 2015) it is very important that the government's planning and implementation efforts are effective and result in economic benefits while being sustainable in the longer term. By identifying the problems and challenges in Oman's tourism planning and implementation process and the scope for strengthening stakeholder participation within this process, this study provides practical solutions to decision-makers to strengthen tourism development initiatives by addressing the identified issues. As noted by Winckler (2007) and Bontenbal, and Aziz (2013), the wider community in Oman is not fully open to the idea of tourism development as they fear that tourism will harm their culture and local identity. Such resistance can negatively affect the longer-term sustainability of tourism development in Oman. This thesis addresses these specific concerns of wider stakeholder participation and provides practical solutions to obtain and integrate stakeholder input in tourism-related decision making.

1.6 Thesis Structure

Following this introductory chapter which has laid out the rationale and significance of this study and its aims and objectives, the thesis is divided into seven further chapters as follows:

Chapter two explains the theoretical underpinnings of the tourism planning process and the evolution of stakeholder participation as a solution for sustainable tourism development. It examines the rationale for stakeholder participation in tourism planning decisions in developing countries. The chapter also reviews the available literature on tourism planning in the Sultanate of Oman.

Chapter three presents the methodology used to achieve the objectives of the study. It presents the research design, the data collection methods, the research sample, and the techniques of data analysis that were used to achieve the objectives of this study.

Chapter four presents the critical discourse analysis of two government planning documents related to the Omani tourism sector: Oman Vision 2020 and OTS 2040. The two documents are analysed in terms of the presented discourse to shed light on the planning process and the current extent of stakeholder participation in tourism planning in Oman. The findings from the document analysis are directly relevant to the first objective of this study.

Chapter five presents the findings from the first stage of primary data collection, i.e., in-depth semi-structured key informant interviews with tourism stakeholders in Oman. The critical analysis of stakeholder discourse from the interviews provides the data required for Research Objectives 1 and 2 of this study.

Chapter six presents the discourse analysis of the focus group discussions and interviews that were conducted in the second stage of primary data collection. Critical discourse analysis of the participants feedback on two illustrations that reflect two variations of the tourism planning process in Oman is undertaken to gain further understanding of stakeholder views of the planning and stakeholder participation process.

Chapter seven discusses the overall findings of the study regarding the research objectives. It also directly addresses the third research objective by presenting a proposed integrated framework for tourism planning and stakeholder participation for Oman that addresses the identified weaknesses and strengths of the existing system.

Chapter eight concludes the study and highlights its key findings concerning the research aims and objectives, its theoretical and practical contributions, and its limitations.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature on the core concepts of tourism planning and stakeholder participation. After briefly examining the importance and impact of the tourism industry, it analyses the literature on tourism planning approaches and the concept of stakeholder participation. It then examines stakeholder participation within the context of tourism planning and explores the relevance and application of stakeholder participation in tourism planning in developing countries and countries that do not have a democratic form of governance. The chapter also reviews the importance of tourism to Oman as an emerging tourism destination and the available evidence on tourism planning in the Sultanate of Oman.

2.2 Tourism Impact

The tourism sector is considered one of the most promising sources of economic growth, and employment and for reducing poverty (Hrubcova et al. 2016) for both developed and developing countries (Sharpley, 2002). Tourism's ability to attract foreign investment and enhance infrastructure as well as promote cooperation by bringing together different cultures, backgrounds, and nationalities makes it an important driver for national and regional growth. The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) defines tourism as "a social and cultural and economic phenomenon, which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business and professional purposes" (Westcott, 2018, p. 9). Considered the biggest industry in the world, (Hall, 2008), the volume of tourism surpasses the level of exports of oil, food, and automobiles (UNWTO, 2017). Tourism accounts for over 12.5% of total global exports and about 30% of world trade in services (Vukotić and Vojnović, 2016). In 2017, tourism contributed 10.4% of international GDP and an estimated 319 million jobs worldwide (WTTC, 2019). It is the main income generator for many countries, and is an important driver of socio-economic development in many others by boosting related sectors such as telecommunications, transportation, construction and agriculture (Sautter and Leisen, 1999; Chaperon, 2016).

For many countries, the success of their tourism strategy is measured solely by its contribution to national GDP. Indeed, tourism contribution to GDP is a widely accepted method of measuring the competitiveness and performance of the tourism sector (Risso et al.

2010; Dupeyras and MacCallum, 2013). However, Hall (2008) notes that the importance of tourism does not come only from the economic value it generates but the myriad of ways it touches human lives. Due to the multifaceted complexity, dynamic and integrated nature of the tourism product, the sector has the potential to impact multiple sectors both globally as well as nationally. Multiple factors make tourism a rewarding sector for developing countries which according to Telfer and Sharpley (2008), include the consistently high levels of growth in tourism, its use of a destination's natural resources, its backward linkages with multiple sectors and services, and its ability to redistribute wealth from developed to developing countries.

However, despite all the potential benefits of tourism, the evidence indicates that these benefits may not be equitably distributed amongst the society (Marzuki and Hay, 2013). The literature shows that a laissez-faire approach to tourism in many developing countries without adequate emphasis on planning has resulted in a multitude of problems and negative impacts. These include environmental pollution, ecological erosion and damage, traffic congestion and infrastructure overload and urban sprawl among others (Edgell, 1990). Adverse socio-cultural and security impacts from tourism include intruding on or changing the local culture, and lifestyle and negatively affecting the quality of life through increased crime, security risks and inflation (Al Balushi and Wise, 2017; Woo et al. 2018; Wang et al. 2019; Wanner and Pröbstl-Haider, 2019). Frequent interactions between residents and tourists have the potential to change local culture over time and this can be viewed as negative (Bleasdale, 2006). For example, according to some critics, tourism often leads to the assimilation of local cultures, thereby eroding the authenticity offered by many tourism marketers (Alsayyad, 2013). Ogaboh Agba et al. (2010) finds that even when acting with good intentions to protect their local culture, governments can fail, and careful monitoring by local stakeholders is required to prevent adverse impacts on local culture and society.

The overwhelming consensus in the literature is that tourism is a complex multifaceted industry having wide ranging impact on tourism destinations and therefore requires deliberate and careful planning. Ladkin and Betramini (2002), Dredge and Jamal (2015) argue that the fallout from inappropriate tourism planning and the scattered nature of tourism must be addressed by a comprehensive planning approach that takes into account the myriad factors and actors involved in and impacted from tourism development. There is probably no other industry or sector that involves such a variety of products and services and relies on multiple

other sectors for its success. Furthermore, tourists' experiences are affected by all of the organisations that they interact with during their visit in order to meet their needs, and if any of these needs are not properly met, the experience may not be satisfactory (Saftic, 2011). Therefore, according to Dodds (2007) and Saarinen et al. (2017) a holistic and integrated approach is required to ensure that tourism development is sustainable.

However, not all countries have well established systems for achieving the best outcomes in tourism development (Graci, 2013, Andriotis et al. 2018) and this is particularly so in the case of developing countries which have recently joined the race for tourism development (Hall, 2008, Graci, 2013, Adu-Ampong, 2017). Moscardo (2011) argues that although tourism development is touted as a solution for developing underdeveloped regions, the results are often marked by conflicts and concerns within the community. In many countries especially in the Middle East, e.g., Jordan (Harrill, 2004, Alrwajfah et al. 2019) and Oman (Al-Maimani and Johari, 2014), the existing planning frameworks requires significant improvements to enhance returns. According to Bello et al. (2016, p.472), most tourism planning models focus more on tourism development than planning, and are not customised to suit developing countries as they were mostly designed for developed countries. They argue that such planning models are built on western theories without considering their suitability for non-western cultures.

Hence, there is a need to understand how developing countries can develop their tourism planning systems, and improve stakeholder participation, in particular (Andriotis et al. 2018) in order to enhance the benefits from tourism while reducing adverse impacts. The next sections explore the literature on tourism planning and the concept of stakeholder participation in tourism planning.

2.3 Theoretical Framework of Tourism Planning and Implementation

The literature on planning refers to planning as a process and not an event. Although there are a variety of definitions of planning, one of the key characteristics of planning is that it is oriented towards the future or is forward looking. Friedman (1993, p. 428) defined planning as the “professional practice that specifically seeks to connect forms of knowledge with forms of action in the public domain”. He distinguishes planning from its implementation, as not all plans are prepared for implementation, for example, project feasibility plans may be prepared for the purpose of seeking funds. While the average person might consider the

outcome of planning as more important, it is the process element of planning that is particularly important. A generally accepted and simple definition of planning is one by Cullingworth and Craves (2009, p.6), who define planning as “a process of formulating goals and agreeing on the manner in which these are to be met”. A key element of this definition is its emphasis on identifying goals and agreeing on how these will be met and applied to contexts such as organizational, individual, governmental, non-governmental and so on. Hence, as noted by Hall (2000) one of the key elements of the planning process is decision making.

The outcome of the tourism planning process is the tourism plan which is a document that lays out the future direction and trajectory of tourism in a destination. Tourism planning at national levels will tend to be strategic in nature with the focus on setting the direction, priorities, objectives, and strategies or broad guidelines for achieving the stated objectives (Ibrahim, 2013). According to Hill et al. (2004), strategic planning fundamentally includes the following elements: defining the vision, mission and goals, an external analysis of opportunities and threats and an internal analysis of strengths and weaknesses (i.e., a SWOT analysis). This is followed by the development of objectives and strategies to address the issues raised in the SWOT analysis. Such national level tourism planning is unlikely to include or discuss all the specific details of actions required as these would be best left to specific regional and local site planning. For example, regional plans can better address the needs of localities which may be more traditional or less exposed to tourists and other cultures with more sensitivity than national plans (Ibrahim 2013). As emphasised by Cao (2015), it is best to allow local destinations more say in tourism related decisions based on their own contexts, as tourism is locally specific, and this can happen within the contexts of regional and local plans. However, national level plans should always set the context for all further tourism related plans in the country.

Prior to the 1990s, government involvement in tourism planning and development was indirect and did not include formal approaches or structures (Wahab, 2000 as cited in Marzuki and Hay, 2013). As a result, much unplanned and uncontrolled development occurred, leading to environmental degradation and socio-economic imbalances. A belated discovery was the importance of sustainability in relation to tourism development (Cao, 2015) and the literature is now full of evidence that shows how unplanned tourism growth poses a significant threat to sustainable tourism development (Mathieson and Wall, 1982;

Getz, 1992; Costa, 2019; Pjerotić et al. 2016; Lin and Simmons, 2017; Andriotis et al.; 2018; Var and Gun, 2020). Several authors (Pjerotić et al. 2016, Lin and Simmons, 2017, Andriotis, et al. 2018, Var and Gun, 2020), affirm that effective planning plays a significant role in ensuring sustainability in the tourism industry.

In the development literature, the Brundtland Commission (1987) defined sustainable development as addressing “the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. This definition brings into consideration not just the needs of the current generation but the future needs of future generations. A well-known definition of tourism planning by Getz (1987), states it is “a process which seeks to optimise the potential contribution of tourism to human welfare and environmental quality” (as cited in Morpeth and Hongliang, 2015, p. 5). This definition links tourism planning and development with human wellbeing as well as the environment, both of which are key to the sustainability of the tourism sector. Although the link to future generations in Getz’s definition is not explicit, it is implicit in its reference to human welfare and environmental quality. According to Aronsson (2000), sustainable tourism planning and development requires consideration of not just economic but also the political, socio-cultural, ecological, and geographical factors. Hence, tourism planning must not only achieve economic returns but ensure alignment with other key industry and economic sectors to protect resources, societal values and norms, improve the standard of life of residents and promote destinations (Williams, 2009; Jordan et al. 2013; Lew, 2017; Bianchi, 2018). Therefore, tourism plans must be prepared in alignment with other national development goals to ensure better implementation and more effective use of national resources. As Cao (2015) emphasises, a cohesive and coherent national policy and regulatory framework is a fundamental requirement for sustainable tourism planning and development.

Moreover, plans must be acted on; without their successful implementation, tourism plans by themselves will have little value. Implementation must be considered within the planning process itself and supported with practical steps (Shepherd, 1998; Veal, 2002; Lai et al. 2006). Often there is a significant gap between tourism plans and what can be practically achieved during implementation. This may be due to variety of factors, including, plans lacking relevant details, being too broad to be feasible, based on insufficient analysis or miscalculations, or lacking stakeholder involvement, all of which creates problems in implementation (Lai et al. 2006). Other barriers to effective implementation of tourism plans

include the lack of previous plans and planning expertise, undue focus on short-term economic gains, limited stakeholder involvement, lack of integration between national and regional plans, and lack of accountability and coordination among government planners and agencies (Dodds, 2007). At a national level, successful implementation requires attention to elements such as tourism related legislation, investment incentives for the private sector, manpower resource planning as well as environmental and sociocultural considerations (Inskeep, 1991; Morpeth and Hongliang, 2015). Because of tourism's complex links with many other sectors and the variety of linked products and services involved, successful implementation of tourism plans requires the cooperation, support, and coordination of multiple governmental and non-governmental groups. Furthermore, as noted by Hall (2011), sustainable tourism development requires substantial government efforts and coordination outside of the normal tourism-specific governance. Therefore, there may be a need for bespoke governance that enables practical progress by providing clear direction and cohesiveness in tourism development according to the country or context (Bramwell & Lane, 2011).

The stages of planning that are common to different tourism planning models have been analysed and discussed by authors including McCann (1983), Moscardo (2011), and Jordan et al. (2013). The findings of these 3 authors on tourism planning stages are summarised in Table 1. McCann (1983) identified three steps in tourism planning (as cited in Jamal and Getz, 1995; p.189). The first phase is 'problem-setting' which involves identifying relevant planning issues and important stakeholders. The second phase is 'direction setting' which involves discussions about future cooperation and shared goals. The third phase of 'implementation' involves establishing a system for putting into practice the shared values and goals. Jordan et al. (2013, p.281) does not differ much from McCann (1983) in their identification of the stages; for them, the planning process starts with direction setting, followed by development and implementation.

Moscardo (2011) analysed 36 tourism planning models and identified five common stages among these models. The main difference between Moscardo's (2011) planning stages and the other two (McCann 1983; Jordan et al. 2013) is that Moscardo's is more detailed and includes stakeholder participation within the planning process. From her analysis, the planning process starts with establishing goals, visions, and objectives. The next step is to analyse the current situation in terms of inventory and data to ensure the availability of

accurate information and facts on which decisions can be made. The third stage is to seek input from relevant stakeholders which is then used to develop strategies, plans and policies. Further stages are implementation of the plans or policies. The last stage is careful monitoring which is supported by marketing and training to enhance results.

McCann (1983)	Moscardo (2011)	Jordan et al. (2013)
1. Problem-Setting: <i>Identifying relevant issues</i>	1. Establishing Goals: <i>Vision, Objectives, Problems</i>	1. Direction Setting
	2. Situation Appraisal: <i>Research, Analysis and Inventory</i>	
2. Direction Setting: <i>Setting goals, objectives, and mechanisms</i>	3a. Stakeholder Input: <i>Consultation</i>	2. Development
	3b. Development: <i>Strategies, Plans, Policies</i>	
3. Implementation: <i>System for achieving the objectives</i>	4. Implementation: <i>Action</i>	3. Implementation
	5 Evaluation: <i>Monitoring and Refinement</i>	

Table 1: Stages in the Tourism Planning Process

2.4 Approaches to Tourism Planning

Several approaches to, or traditions of tourism planning have been discussed in the literature. According to Burns (2004) tourism planning may follow one of two broad approaches; one focuses on market and economic requirements and the other seeks development adopting democratic methods. Getz (1986) classified more than 150 models of tourism planning into four main approaches, namely, the economic-boost, industry-oriented, community-based, and physical-spatial approaches (as cited in Morpeth and Hongliang, 2015). Hall (2005) added one more tourism planning approach which is sustainability, in which social, economic and environmental aspects are integrated within planning. All the four approaches identified by Getz (1986) are intended to gain the economic benefits of tourism but focus on different strategies to obtain the economic benefits. The community-based approach sees the natural and cultural attractions of a destination as benefiting the local community, and, unlike the other three approaches, it aims at a fairer distribution of the benefits of tourism to local

communities in tourism destinations, and at devolving more power to the local community level. The economic-boost approach or boosterism sees cultural and natural resources as a means of maximising economic returns to the country. In boosterism, the government dominates decision-making, the aims of which is purely to boost market demand. Like boosterism, the industry approach is also government-dominated and sees the tourism industry as an independent sector equal to other industrial sectors. However, the industry approach has a wider remit than boosterism, with the focus on matching market demand with supply on issues such as job creation and investment. This is an expert-led planning style where experts' views lead the government decision-making process with little attention paid to the social and environmental cost of tourism development. Lastly, the physical-spatial approach sees tourism as a physical development that uses the environment for expansion. The focus here is on building tourism facilities that correspond to the nature of the destination to be developed with an eye on preventing environmental exploitation (Morpeth and Yan, 2015).

There have been three major reviews of tourism planning models, namely, Getz (1986), Hall (2005), and Moscardo (2011), which found that these models have not deviated significantly from the original approaches. Getz's review revealed that tourism planning models were mostly linked to 'boosterism' and 'economic' approaches to planning, leading him to emphasise that further developments of these models must give more consideration to environmental issues. Hall's review in 2005 revealed that in the 'boostersim' and 'economic' traditions, locals were used as a product to be enjoyed by tourists or as workers in the tourism industry. Moscardo (2011) noted that there has not been much change to planning models and they remain centered around the original approaches. Despite the focus on economic benefits in the early models, there is agreement in the literature that tourism planning must be more cognizant and sensitive towards non-economic issues including social, cultural, and environmental concerns (Timothy et al. 2001; Ladkin and Bertramini, 2010; Morpeth and Hongliang, 2015). For this reason, further investigations into the challenges in tourism planning in the developing world, can lead to new planning models or processes that are more applicable to these contexts and regions. There is also increasing agreement that more stakeholder participation is needed in tourism planning models. This is the subject of the next section.

2.4.1 Planning and Stakeholder Participation

The theories that inform the concept of stakeholder participation in planning and development include the ‘participative turn’ in western planning theory developed by writers such as Patsy Healey during the 1990s who were inspired by the work of Jurgen Habermas on ‘deliberative democracy’ and ‘communicative theory’. Floridaia (2013) describes the origin of the ‘participative turn’ as a demand that societies need to be involved in policymaking in issues that have an impact on them. The theory of ‘deliberative democracy’ suggests that the public must justify to each other the regulations and civic plans based on acceptable logic in order to mutually deliver a better outcome (Gutmann, 2009). In communicative action theory, people seek confirmation that their goals are reasonable and so they engage with others to reach a shared understanding of what are credible goals, and which merit their cooperation (Habermas, 1981).

Theoretically, the implication of the participative turn is that all relevant voices should be heard, and stakeholders are expected to come to an agreement on issues through debate. However, in planning and decision-making there is no agreement on the best way of how decisions should be made. Dryzek’s analysis of environmental decision-making, characterises three alternative approaches to decision-making in planning: administrative rationalism, economic rationalism, and democratic pragmatism, only the latter of which exemplifies participation (1997, p.63-102):

(1) Administrative rationalism – ‘leave it to the experts’

This approach is based on the supposition that there is a logical or scientific solution to every planning problem, and the best intellects in the country can be relied on to find that solution. Such intellectuals or scientists are assumed to be dispassionate in their decision-making and not influenced by value judgements or ideologies or special interests. This is the credo of modernism, whereby objective reason rules.

(2) Economic rationalism – ‘leave it to the market’

Economic rationalism states that the market can be trusted to make the best planning decisions as it does not discriminate between people or interests or values; instead, it relies on the forces of supply and demand to determine which planning decisions should be made. This approach argues that no one person or group can take all relevant considerations into account, because those circumstances are too numerous, and the inter-relationships are too

complicated. Only the market can operate without coercion to decide between complex alternatives. This is the credo of neo-liberalism whereby the market rules.

(3) Democratic pragmatism – ‘leave it to the people’

Democratic pragmatism as the term implies, means giving the public the responsibility for making planning decisions. Democratic pragmatists reject the assumption of administrative rationalists that there is a correct or scientific solution to every planning problem. There are no correct decisions but only good or bad decisions, and they are good or bad according to the judgement of the people who will have to comply with them. Democratic pragmatists also reject the economic rationalist’s reliance on the market, on the grounds that the market works best for the rich and privileged who have the means to protect their interests, and not for those who do not have the power to defend their interests. Democratic pragmatists recognize that this form of planning decision-making is messy; however, messiness is a price worth paying for non-coercive self-determination. This is the credo of post-modernism, whereby public opinion rules.

There is a danger that democratic pragmatism will either be anarchical and fail to reach decisions at all (i.e., deadlocked) or the majority’s will may be imposed upon the minority. Democratic pragmatism relies on Habermas’ theory (1981) of communicative action which explains how people can gradually transcend their divisive or selfish interests and increasingly understand and embrace the public interest through dialogue. Communicative action is an inherently consensual form of decision-making based on a rational process that relies on genuine discussion conducted by people paying respect to each other’s views, rather than a shouting match (anarchy) or a dismissal of dissident views (majoritarianism). Similarly, Healey (1992), argues that by an extensive process of dialogue and deliberation the public will eventually reach a consensus. Communicative action has been criticised for naively believing that consensus will be reached by dialogue when society may be fundamentally divided by class, gender, culture, or race or ideology (Tewdwr-Jones, 1998). Critics argue that democratic rationalism is an unrealistic mode of decision-making – at best an ideal type of governance as it requires conditions that cannot be realised or verified.

Nevertheless, these theories paved the way for the early participation theories, which according to Freeman et.al, (2020) were aimed at deciding the best way to develop policies and make decisions. By then, the focus in planning had shifted from the government being the ultimate decision-maker to one which reflected the wider environmental, social, political,

and economic changes (Dredge and Jamal, 2015). The developed world's theories of participation are built on the 'accumulated' experience of democracy (Tosun, 1999). The participative approach has been used extensively in developed countries for policy making in the areas of public health and education and much later for tourism development (Ladkin and Bertramini, 2002).

Participation is considered essential for sustainable development and involves active citizen and community participation in development projects at all stages (Florida, 2013). The need to ensure sustainability of tourism development gave rise to more inclusive and collaborative approaches to planning that focuses on involving the various stakeholders in the tourism planning decision-making process (Moscardo, 2011). The lack of effective stakeholder participation is claimed to be a significant problem that undermines the sustainability of tourism policies (Waligo et al. 2013). Dredge and Jamal (2015) emphasise that better returns from tourism can only be achieved by coordinating the efforts of the different economic, social and services institutions, and this, requires consideration and integration of differing perspectives of the various actors in planning decisions. So, while it may be difficult and time consuming to engage with different stockholders, there is consensus in the literature on the importance of stakeholder participation as a vital tool in tourism planning to ensure sustainable tourism development (Keogh, 1990; Maiden, 2008; Wanner and Pröbstl-Haider, 2019).

2.4.2 Evidence-Based Policy

A recent form of policy development is evidence-based policy, which is a term and process borrowed from the medical field (Pawson, and Ray, 2006) to be applied in other fields such as tourism. Evidence-based policy means taking into account only the knowledge that works i.e., evidence, and leaving out anything that does not have an evidential basis (De Marchi et al. 2016; Strassheim and Kettunen, 2014). Hence, from a stakeholder participation angle, one may think that evidence-based policy is about taking decisions based on the evidence rather than the views of different stakeholders. However, as noted by De Marchi et al. (2016), evidence can be viewed differently and can be influenced ideologically which means that it still requires the validation of stakeholders. Moreover, when collecting evidence from stakeholders it is critical to understand the power they enjoy and the ideology they hold, because their validation of the evidence is likely to be influenced by these factors (Font et al. 2015). Such understanding is helpful in collecting evidence that can support a policy.

Assessing the robustness of an evidence-based policy also includes examining how involved stakeholders were in its development (Strassheim and Kettunen, 2014), and in their assessment of the development process (De Marchi et al. 2016). According to De Marchi et al (2016) government policy is not a sole government matter, rather it is a public matter that concerns all relevant stakeholders; hence its deliberation and legitimation from the public is an essential pillar. Moreover, even if evidence collected for a policy is linked to previous policies, it still needs deliberation from the public. In addition, the task of selecting the most useful knowledge as evidence is itself a subjective matter and so cannot be assumed to represent the truth, in a positivist sense. Rather, it should be understood as acceptable truth constructed in accordance with the social context (De Marchi et al. 2016).

Critiques of evidence-based policy note that evidence collected for policy can sometimes be collected to support the policy makers point of view. Politicisation of policies means deviating from relying on evidence to considering issues that are in line with political interests. Or rather that when policies are made, the evidence that will be used is that which conforms to the dominant political will while other good evidence may not be collected. Furthermore, evidence and figures produced by studies that use, for example, mathematical modelling could be seriously flawed (Saltelli and Giampietro, 2017). If such evidence or figures form the basis for policy making, the resulting policy would have detrimental consequences. Sometimes evidence collected may contradict the science, but the contradictions are overlooked for political purposes and used to inform policy (Saltelli and Giampietro, 2017). To avoid politicisation of policies and modelling errors, studies recommend the involvement of different stakeholders (such as non-academic participants and NGOs) to help in understanding what counts as valid evidence (Heras and Tàbara 2014; Miller et al. 2014) as well as to consider the value of inherited local knowledge (Kealiikanakaoleohaililani and Giardina 2016). This suggests that evidence-based policy requires validation from stakeholders as to what constitutes the best evidence.

2.5 Contemporary Stakeholder Theory

With the increasing focus on sustainable tourism development, stakeholder theory became one of the most important vehicles for addressing the environmental, economic, and social aspects of sustainability (Hörisch et al. 2014). The fundamental tenet of stakeholder theory is normative as it posits that stakeholder interests have intrinsic value. The stakeholder concept was first advocated by Freeman in 1984 as part of organisational management theory

(Sauter and Leisen, 1999). A stakeholder may be defined as anyone affected: “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation’s objectives” (Freeman, 1984 p.46); or more narrowly as anyone having an interest or function: “those individuals, groups, or organisations with an interest in a common problem or issue” (Gray (1989) as cited in Jiang and Ritchie, 2017, p.71); or normatively as anyone having a legitimate concern. Freeman et al. (2020) note that stakeholder participation theory came about to suggest that stakeholders should be engaged in decision-making to provide better solutions for problems. They argue that the inclusion of wider beliefs, customs, and morals is a way of enhancing (organisational) effectiveness by considering the effect of decision-making on societies that cannot be aligned in other ways.

Stakeholder theory holds that the interests of all stakeholder groups must be considered and coordinated irrespective of the relative power of each group. In practice however, management does not consider all stakeholder views and a few stakeholders usually have more power over management decision making (Khazaei et al. 2015). Nevertheless, the organisation’s relationship with its stakeholders must be managed well and their input must inform decision making to ensure effectiveness. Since its introduction, stakeholder theory has been further developed and applied to various disciplines, including tourism.

2.5.1 Tourism Stakeholders

In tourism the term 'stakeholder' seeks to capture an inclusive definition of those who are functionally essential to tourism as well as those with a legitimate concern about a place (Healey, 1998). Saftic (2011) contends that whatever definition of stakeholder we choose, it is important to decide who the relevant stakeholders are. If stakeholders are defined by those being ‘affected’ as per Freeman’s (1984) definition, they include those who are both directly or indirectly affected by tourism projects including the wider society or destination communities (Bishop et al. 1994). If Gray’s (1989) functional definition is chosen, functional stakeholders can be categorised into primary and secondary stakeholders. Primary stakeholders are those who are essential for the functioning of the activity including government organisations, destination marketing organisations, hotels, residents, tourism attractions, and transport companies. Secondary stakeholders are those who are not involved in the transactions of the business but are still connected such as Chambers of Commerce, community groups, gas stations, incentive planners, media, and universities (Clarkson, 1995; Saftic, 2011). Swarbrooke (2010) divided tourism stakeholders into five main categories:

government, tourists, host communities, tourism business and other sectors. Another classification of stakeholders includes 'institutional'; and 'local' stakeholders by McGlashan and Williams (2003, as cited in Marzuki and Hay, 2013). While the government planners, experts and professionals are categorised as institutional stakeholders, the citizens are the local stakeholders.

According to Sauter and Leisen (1999), the implementation of stakeholder participation requires tourism planners to first recognise all the different groups or people who have an interest not only in the planning process but also its delivery or implementation and outcomes. Marzuki et al. (2012) notes that identifying stakeholders who may be affected by tourism development is of critical importance for technical, political, and operational reasons. As noted by Swarbrooke (2010) the values of the stakeholders involved will determine what constitutes sustainable tourism and tourism planners must recognise the diverse roles and perspectives of each stakeholder group. For example, a tourism related business entity may play a key role in attracting tourists to a destination, but it also has further roles such as generating profits for its shareholders, providing employment, training, and so on. However, as a business entity, its main priority will be its bottom line, like any other business and such considerations will have to be balanced with the interests of other stakeholders from a macro level development perspective.

Thus, identifying groups as being relevant stakeholders is the crucial first step which will affect the whole process of stakeholder engagement as well as the outcomes of planning. Moreover, according to Healey (1997), stakeholders' opinions are not static but change over time when stakeholders gain new insights. This is because the way people think, believe and act are based upon their interactions with other people (Healey, 2006, p. 44). For this reason, people can make more sense when together in groups. Healey (1996) notes that groups differ from each other in making sense of society because different groups of people have different spheres of connections. Hence, he advocates consensus building through discourse and debate in which all voices are given equal opportunities to be heard, and the best ideas adopted after thorough discussion.

2.5.2 The Rationale for Stakeholder Participation in Tourism Planning

The focus on stakeholder participation as an essential part of tourism planning gained importance since the late 1990s, mainly as a response to address the adverse impacts of

tourism development. Over the last 20 years, elements of stakeholder participation can be found in most tourism planning processes, and the concept has witnessed much theorisation and application via different approaches. The literature indicates that stakeholder participation is considered essential for tourism planning for seven reasons.

First, according to Costa (2019), tourism planning cannot be undertaken effectively by a single decision-maker due to the fragmented nature of the tourism sector. Collaboration between stakeholders helps to integrate the planning process by reducing the fragmented and scattered nature of decision-making and by facilitating dialogue (Skelcher et al. 2005), which leads to consensus on common objectives and visions (Ladkin and Bertramini, 2002) and reduces the chances of lack of coordination between government organisations. Second, it is argued that the participation and backing of stakeholders such as local communities, citizens, and entrepreneurs can reduce local resistance to development projects (Boon et al. 2013). As these stakeholders have different interests, plans will be implemented better if they win the support of stakeholders, such as the local community. Third, according to Zawilińska and Szpara (2016), the only way to resolve anxieties over the impact of tourism on culture and other concerns impacting local communities is through discourse and collaboration between the various interest groups. Public participation can protect local communities from tourism's adverse impacts while diversifying the resulting benefits from tourism (Timothy, 1999). Fourth, stakeholder participation in planning reduces tensions over tourism development plans that inevitably occur between different groups (Bobbio, 2019; Gallo et al. 2018). McKercher et al. (2005) argue that although the differing interests of stakeholders can create conflicts, engaging these stakeholders effectively in planning and development can sort out such conflicts. As stakeholders would already have an idea about the impact of development that could be implemented, any conflicts can be addressed before the implementations of plans.

Fifth, more stakeholder participation in tourism planning can encourage more people to get involved in tourism projects leading to better returns and benefits in the longer term. For instance, more interactions between stakeholders can lead to coordinated events (Angella and Go, 2009), improved employment opportunities, more interest in starting tourism related businesses (Li, 2006), and quality improvements in tourism infrastructure (Burns and Howard, 2003). Different people have different ideas and therefore participation widens the range of innovative opinions and values that can help decision-makers to think outside the

box beyond the conventional wisdom (Bramwell and Sharman, 1999). Cornwall and Coelho (2007) note that the inclusion of stakeholders who had been previously omitted will help in the infusion of new ideas and options.

Sixth, stakeholder participation is an important safeguard in ensuring sustainability by preventing imbalanced tourism development and exploitation of local communities and the environment by powerful tourism developers (Tosun, 2005; Wanner and Pröbstl-Haider, 2019). Insufficient attention paid to social and environmental considerations in tourism planning has led to calls for more participation, for example by NGOs, which can save resources and help in setting standards for environmental protection (Bramwell and Lane, 2011; Moscardo, 2011). Sustainable tourism development is about the optimum utilisation of tourism resources to meet current demands without jeopardising the future use of these resources (WCED, 1987, p.49). The very close interconnection and dependence between tourism and the natural environment requires cooperation between the industry, the government, environmental NGOs, and others to sustain tourism resources (Wondirad et al. 2020). A recent study by Wanner and Pröbstl-Haider (2019, p.1) of a programme in Southeast Europe aimed at encouraging sustainable tourism projects among its member countries through “peer learning and bottom-up development process” found that the best way to achieve the programme’s mission is through the inclusion of all relevant stakeholders.

Seventh, unless all stakeholders are on board with the planning of tourism projects, there is a risk that the tourist experience will be spoiled (Saftic, 2011), thereby damaging the reputation and attractiveness of the destination. As a key part of tourists’ experience in a destination is closely linked to local culture and the community, if tourism plans do not consider community interests or expectations, this can easily endanger the quality of the tourists’ experience.

Hence the literature on tourism planning and development strongly indicates that engaging with stakeholders is key in educating the public about planning and development efforts and integrating stakeholder opinions in decisions. Lack of effective stakeholder engagement results in poor or ineffective planning and implementation decisions and serious social and environmental harm, which can negatively affect the tourism sector itself.

2.5.3 Stakeholder Power

In the context of tourism development, power refers to the “the capacity of individuals to make decisions that affect their lives” (Johnson and Wilson, 2000, p. 1892). Stakeholder power is the ability to influence decision-making and the role of each stakeholder is determined by the extent of power that each stakeholder has in influencing decisions. In any organised community, government systems (and their agencies) have the most important influence or power in decision making. Crane and Ruebottom (2012) contend that although the concept of stakeholder participation has been refined and applied over two decades to multiple disciplines, stakeholders are still defined by the generic economic value or power they bring to the situation. The large number of actors that need to take part in stakeholder participation reduces the roles each stakeholder group can have in the process and therefore their power.

Effective participation requires transparent processes that directly lead to decision-making (Pita et al. 2010). There should be clarity on the role of each stakeholder, so that any constraints or problems that could lead to deadlock are managed. Participation may be compromised if government officials identify themselves as experts rather than as collaborators, or where ideological positions are adopted (Moscardo, 2011). Jordan et al. (2013) argues that the governance structure within a community can either facilitate or inhibit citizen participation and determines how decision-making power is distributed. Beaumont and Dredge (2010) found that the type of governance has significant influence on the relationships and power structures between the government, tourism businesses, citizens, and local tourism organisations. A key constraint that hinders effective stakeholder participation is the top-down management system which does not allow power sharing which is fundamental for effective stakeholder participation in decision making (Azeiteiro et al. 2012).

Furthermore, lack of information sharing will result in information being more available to some stakeholders than others. Moscardo (2011) argues that in developing regions such as Africa, residents in tourism destinations are normally given very limited or no roles in the tourism planning and governance process and this results in their lack of tourism knowledge and experience, which in turn is used to support the argument that effective tourism development must be directed by other stakeholders external to the destination. Jordan et al. (2013) notes that efforts to involve residents in tourism-planning may be opposed by

traditional or formal organisations such as city councils, elected or appointed officials, and chambers of commerce, the members of which are used to expert-led planning processes.

Participation empowers groups who would normally be marginalised and enables them to feel a sense of ownership over the resulting plans (Amran et al. 2013). This is based on the normative argument that the task of planning should not be left to government officials and few investors, but rather it should allow as many parties as possible to get involved in discussions in order to lend legitimacy to the planning process (Marzuki et al. 2012; Lin and Simmons, 2017). However, despite awareness of the importance of stakeholder participation, tourism planners are often more interested in the output rather than the process (Hatipoglu et al. 2016). Yet good output depends on the process i.e., the structure of stakeholder interactions and decision-making which must be identified.

In contexts where the output itself is considered more important, the use of experts such as consultants or academics are often justified. According to Saito and Ruhanen (2017), to improve stakeholder participation it is vital to understand the power of different stakeholders, especially the ‘competent power’ possessed by experts such as consultancy companies and how they can influence decision-making. Hannam and Knox, (2005) find that experts exert influence by having the capacity to oversee tourism knowledge. Tennøy et al. (2016, p.24) suggests that “decision-makers use experts’ knowledge” in order to defend their choices. However, they found that planners often do not use expert knowledge if it contradicts their own previous planning experiences or their political agenda. So, when decision-makers are faced with an opposing view, they often ignore expert knowledge. Sometimes planners purposely omit or tone down certain statistics or facts which are highlighted by the experts. Experts could make their contributions more acceptable if, for example, rather than presenting a scientific view about environmental issues, they presented an ethical argument about the benefits to stakeholders from considering environmental issues (Saito et al, 2014).

Reliance on external consultants and organisations to develop tourism plans is one way in which destination communities lose power especially when if this coupled with a lack of community understanding of tourism and its consequences (Mason et al. 1998; Reid et al. 2004; Moscardo 2011). Jordan et al. (2013) studied two tourism planning processes in Sitka, Alaska. one of which was collaborative with high citizen power in influencing decisions. However, because the local government feared loss of power in decision-making, higher

experts were asked to prepare another plan. The second plan had less participation from the wider community and was confined to elite participants but was nevertheless adopted.

What may be considered as sustainable tourism practices in one destination may be unsustainable in another destination and hence identifying key stakeholders and understanding how each group perceives and protects its own interests is critical. The challenges in enabling power and information sharing among stakeholder groups, ensuring transparency of process etc. will be considerably more significant in developing and non-democratic countries. Hence, as noted by Young et al. (2013), deeper understanding of the risks associated with the process and outcomes of participation requires further scrutiny of stakeholder participation in different contexts and environments.

2.6 Extent of Stakeholder Participation

A useful measure to assess the effectiveness of stakeholder participation is to look at the process (Head, 2008). For the process to be considered effective, the planner must not have too much influence on the process but must allow contributors to 'guide' the process (NOAA, 2017, p.8). The extent to which participants views will influence the final outcome should be clearly stated. This includes opportunities for participants to raise their concerns early in the process and to influence the final output of a plan (NOAA, 2017). This means the stakeholder participation process enables involvement in decision-making thus creating more transparency and representativeness. On normative assumptions an inclusive stakeholder participation process can yield a better outcome. Agger (2012), however, emphasises that the extent of public participation in policy making needs to be tailor-made to match the realities of a given destination.

Stakeholder participation is a legal requirement for planning and development in many countries (Begg, 2018), though often the government decides who the stakeholders are, and which stakeholders are to be included and how stakeholder participation should be carried out. Moreover, the extent of stakeholder involvement remains debatable as in some contexts more engagement maybe helpful while in some other cases it may not. For this reason, understanding different contexts is important in deciding the extent of participation that may be appropriate or even possible. Stakeholder participation in tourism planning itself thus takes many forms with some more inclusive than others. The next sections examine different forms of stakeholder participation in tourism planning.

2.6.1 Public and Local Community Participation

A participative approach which emphasises the inclusion of local or destination communities in tourism related decision making has gained popularity in the literature especially in the last two decades and is referred to as the community-based tourism model (CBT). The argument for local community participation is that it is indispensable for sustainable tourism development and minimises the adverse impacts of tourism (Okazaki, 2008). If tourism is used for regional development, then opportunities should be provided for local stakeholders to be involved not only in economic activities but also in the decision-making process (Marzuki et al. 2012). France (1998, p. 228) emphasises the role of local people in his definition of participation which is “a process of empowerment that helps to involve local people in the identification of problems, decision-making and implementation which can contribute to sustainable development”.

The commonality in most studies on local community participation is that they focus on the functional aspects (process) and outcomes of such stakeholder collaboration. Studies such as Dabphet (2012) and Wanner and Pröbstl-Haider (2019), have investigated problems with identifying relevant stakeholders in rural areas, barriers to participation in peripheral places and stages of stakeholder participation. Saftic and Lud (2011) and Bramwell and Sharman (1999) have explored the application of stakeholder participation in deciding target market segments and tourism management and implementation. Both studies recommend a single organisation must be identified to lead the planning and consultation process as multiple stakeholders are involved. Jordan et al. (2013) note that local communities can form non-profit, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to represent and address their community needs, rather than relying on traditional agents such as city councils and elected representatives. Others such as Fraser et al. (2006), Dredge and Jamal (2015), and Bello et al. (2016) have examined the effectiveness of local community participation from a variety of angles including conservation and protection, effect on sustainability decisions, tourism impacts, developing tourism destinations and information requirements of local residents to effectively participate.

Public participation is not seen as a mere top-down dissemination of information from the government to the public but as their involvement in decision-making. For some writers, participation should be considered as a bargaining process (Bramwell and Sharman, 2000) or as a vehicle for the public and the community to express their vision for the future

development, aspirations, and growth of their community (Marzuki et al. 2012). A study by Fraser et al. (2006) on Guernsey Island found that a top-down planning model failed to allow stakeholders to decide topics for discussion e.g., setting sustainability standards for land use, as the planners decided the topics for discussions in advance and expected stakeholders to agree on them. The study recommended allowing local people to change the draft proposals and topics that were prepared by the authorities to improve effectiveness of outcomes. Fraser et al. (2006) also found that the top-down approach was unsuccessful in fighting coastal erosion in British Columbia, Canada.

The timing of public or citizen participation has also been discussed extensively in the literature and there is some consensus that they should be involved as early as possible (Bello et al. 2016). According to Marzuki and Hay (2013), there are three dominant typologies of public participation relevant to tourism planning, namely, Brager's & Specht's typology (1973), Pretty's typology (1995) and, Arnstein's typology (1969), all of which have the following common stages of public participation:

- **Information Stage:** In this stage information about the development is disseminated to the public and the public must be educated about their own role in the planning process. At this stage information flows one way i.e., from the government to the public, as the aim is to increase participant and public understanding of the development process and their roles.
- **Consultation Stage:** The consultation stage is when public opinion is sought and involves information exchange and feedback from the public and other stakeholders to the decision makers. While decision-making power is still retained by the government or representative agency, all stakeholders including the public have the opportunity to advise decision makers of their views and concerns.
- **Empowerment Stage:** The third stage of empowerment takes place with joint decision making, where there is a high level of negotiation. This stage could start with cooperation and delegation of authority by power holders and could end with participants taking control of the decision making. Decision-making power is therefore transferred to citizens and other stakeholders rather than retained solely by the government.

Marzuki and Hay (2013) proposed their own public participation framework (PPF) which builds on the typologies of Brager's & Specht's (1973), Pretty (1995) and, Arnstein (1969). Their PPF differs from the other typologies in that it gives more attention to the details involved in the planning and implementation of the participation process. By breaking down the stages into distinct steps and levels, their PPF addresses the complexities in the participation process in a manner that is systematic and analytic rather than being merely descriptive. Their PPF includes two stages: the planning stage with five steps which are aimed at preparing for the public participation process and the implementation stage of the public participation process which is divided into three levels. The planning stage begins with the setting of participation aims and objectives, followed by the identification of stakeholders. Marzuki and Hay (2013) classify stakeholders in two categories- institutional and local- with the public coming under the category of local stakeholders. Other steps included in the planning stage are settling participation issues through information exchange with the public and power holders and deciding how participation objectives will be achieved. The latter requires consideration of the differing capabilities of participants along with time and budget constraints. The planning stage ends with the creation of the public participation plan.

The implementation stage of the PPF is put into action starting with the 'information level' which focuses on educating stakeholders and providing information about the purpose and process of planning, and their own roles in it. Marzuki and Hay (2013) note that communication can be two-way rather than one-way, with various opportunities offered to participants to play their roles, based on the number of participants, budget, timing and scope of the project. At the next 'consultation level' stakeholders are engaged in extensive discussions and negotiations about the identified issues, or their ideas are sought, and reactions tested. The intention at this level should be to find agreement between all stakeholder groups especially on sensitive issues. Marzouki and Hay's PPF does not restrict numbers of stakeholders at the consultation level but typically, they are likely to be fewer than the information level. In the next level, which is empowerment, the PPF proposes setting up a steering committee which includes participants from all stakeholder groups to take responsibility for the decision-making process. The steering committee should be made up of capable people who are well informed and highly committed representing all stakeholder groups. Marzuki and Hay (2013) emphasises that stakeholder agreement on final decisions is key for the success of the participation process and for the longer-term success of any

project. Table 2 below compares the stages of the public participation typologies in Marzouki and Hay's PPF with those of the previous three writers.

Typologies of Public Participation: Common Sages: Brager & Specht (1973), Pretty (1995) Aronstein (1996)	Public Participation Framework (PPF) Marzouki and Hay (2013)
	<p><u>Planning Stage</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Step 1: Identify participation aims. • Step 2: Identify potential stakeholders. • Step 3: Identify participation issues from public & power holders. • Step 4: Decide participation techniques. • Step 5: Prepare public participation plan.
<p>1. Information Stage: information is disseminated to the public; focus on educating participants about their involvement; one-way flow of information: from government to public</p>	<p><u>Implementation Stage</u></p> <p>Level 1: Information: provision and exchange of information; educating stakeholders two-way communication and review</p>
<p>2. Consultation Stage: public opinion is sought by powerholders; involves information exchange and feedback through discussions</p>	<p>Level 2: Consultation: discussion, two-way communication; receive feedback; test response</p>
<p>3. Empowerment Stage: joint decision-making; decision making power is shared with all stakeholders</p>	<p>Level 3: Empowerment: seeking consensus; sharing decision making; delegating decision-making power</p>

Table 2: Public Participation Typologies/Framework for Tourism Planning

Despite the strong case made in the literature for public participation in tourism planning and development, there is criticism that active public or community participation in tourism planning will lead to conflict between the local community and other stakeholders mainly because of the differences in perception about tourism development (Byrd et al. 2009). The focus on economic benefits as the main priority, often results in less local community representation in decision-making and dissenting voices may even be considered as being anti-development (Marzouki and Hay, 2013). It may also be considered that the public will

not understand the technicalities and complexities involved in planning and decision-making. Furthermore, maintaining public representation at all stages is not easy and problems often relate to administrative systems, participation techniques used and the practical realities of daily life (Marzuki et al. 2012). Further problems are that it is time-consuming and has high transaction costs due to barriers such as lack of awareness, and inexperience of participants, conflicting interests, and insufficient financial resources (Okazaki, 2008).

Despite these criticisms, since local issues and community perceptions can directly impact the quality of tourists' experience as well as the effective use of community resources in enhancing tourism, community participation is strongly advocated in destination planning and development. There are many mechanisms which can strengthen the effectiveness and ounces of public participation. Without educating the public of the potential benefits and risks and making them understand the purpose of participation, public participation will not yield successful planning outcomes. Hence, efforts to include the public should begin with educating and empowering citizens as well as enabling administrative systems and processes (Bryson et al. 2013). Aas et al. 2005 emphasises the importance of public participation programmes that enable residents of local communities to reach informed decisions, by making it clear to them the benefits and potential risks from tourism development. Decisions regarding public participation in tourism planning will also have to consider three aspects: the scope or representativeness of the participating community members, the intensity, frequency, and extent of involvement of the community and the degree to which consensus needs to emerge from the community participation (Bramwell and Sharman, 2000).

In addition to educating local communities, Okazaki (2008) suggests having a competent mediator during local community consultations which can address conflicts and help stakeholders in reaching consensus. Other recommendations include offering benefits to the locals to help build a positive attitude and shared understanding during consultations (Wei, et al. 2012). Pratt (2019) suggests improving bargaining skills of local people, while Proença et al. (2018, p.12) recommends making positive contact with participants and 'building trust and cooperation' with leaders from the different groups. Schilling-Vacaflor (2014) emphasises that a clear and understandable procedure for the consultation process must be established in advance and communicated to the local community for community participation in tourism development to succeed.

2.6.2 Collaborative Planning

Many authors advocate the truly inclusive form of stakeholder participation which is the 'collaborative' planning approach in order to resolve the inherent diversity in issues relating to tourism planning. In inter-organisational theory, Gray (1989) defines collaboration as a process whereby all the parties to a complex problem actively seek a mutually determined solution, while retaining their independence and following shared rules (as cited in Bramwell and Sharman, 1999). In tourism planning contexts, collaborative planning is described as a process where there is 'joint decision-making among autonomous key stakeholders' in order to resolve or manage issues related to planning and implementation (Jamal and Getz, 1995, p.188). The collaborative approach emphasises stakeholder participation leading to consensus and joint decisions i.e., stakeholders are fully involved and empowered by their ability to influence the decision-making process. This approach can be particularly relevant for managing the highly scattered and fragmented nature of the tourism sector, while aligning the views of different stakeholders to reach agreed mutual objectives (Ladkin and Bertramini, 2002; Morpeth and Yan, 2015).

An essential part of the collaborative approach is consensus among stakeholders to mutually agreed solutions, and according to Margerum (2002), this requires processes whereby consensus can be developed, and decision making is shared among stakeholders including the government, interest groups, major sectors and even the public. The indirect participation of citizens in decision-making in democratic governance systems is achieved through their elected representatives who are involved in decisions on behalf of their constituents. Direct involvement of citizens in decision making at national and regional levels can be difficult in a practical sense and as noted by Jordan et al. (2013) is more feasible at a local community level. For many developing countries, however, collaboration with stakeholders in policy decisions especially by the public can be entirely new concepts and can pose additional challenges (Ladkin and Bertramini, 2002).

Moreover, studies indicate that there is lack of agreement on how to implement an inclusive or collaborative stakeholder participation process due to differing political systems and different stakeholders' expectations (Edelenbos and Klijn, 2006; Damme and Brans, 2012). Begg (2018) observes that the history and the political context play an important role in the success of stakeholder participation. Effective stakeholder participation requires transparent processes that directly lead to decision-making (Pita et al. 2010) and stakeholder participation

is greatly influenced by how policy making, and democracy is viewed in each country (Damme and Brans, 2012). Without understanding what the challenges and stakeholder expectations are in a particular country, Damme and Brans (2012) argue that it would not be productive to design an effective participation process. Clearly, any process of stakeholder participation should be customised to fit a particular country or system. Theoretically, in non-democratic contexts, this would entail further examination of how a democratic concept such as stakeholder participation can be practiced or applied. Understanding the dynamics involved in planning decision-making, the power structures among stakeholders, their differing levels of awareness and their expectations is required to enable stakeholder participation processes to be effectively applied in emerging destinations especially those with non-democratic political systems.

2.7 Issues and Challenges of Stakeholder Participation

Although tourism planning originated within Western democratic systems, the evidence indicates that it is not easy to achieve inclusive stakeholder participation in tourism planning and development even in democratic countries. Inclusiveness refers to the extent to which a particular system allows for the different stakeholders to participate in decision making (Dodds et al. 2010; Graci, 2013; Eskerod et al. 2015). Morpeth and Hongliang (2015) identifies several pitfalls within the various tourism planning models or approaches that can constrain an inclusive stakeholder participation process. The main difficulties in ensuring effective stakeholder participation are set out below.

2.7.1 *Limited Participation by Stakeholders*

A key issue with the way stakeholder participation is implemented in tourism planning development models is that they are often limited in their range of stakeholders. Tourism planning approaches in theory and practice have been criticised for marginalising some stakeholders and confining decision-making power to governments and powerful private interests (Getz, 1986; Hall, 2005; Moscardo, 2011). Iorio & Corsale, (2014) state that the collaborative approach does not really specify the stakeholders who are responsible for initiating the planning process leading to problems from the start. Participation can be critically influenced by power relations between stakeholders and understanding such power dynamics is critical for successful tourism planning and implementation (Saito and Ruhanen, 2017). Healy et al. (2012) states that the application of stakeholder participation has resulted

in the weak execution or implementation of planning frameworks. However, according to Van Nguyen et al. (2020) such weak implementation is due to the power battle between different stakeholders and a lack of understanding of local contexts including challenges that local stakeholders had been going through.

Often competing interests and inequalities lead to public-private partnerships being used as a euphemism to justify the focus on short-term economic benefits from tourism (Serra et al. 2016). Such focus on short-term gains often results in the public or local communities being side-lined, which then leads to adverse impacts at the local level thereby reducing sustainability in the longer-term. As Morpeth and Yan (2015) observe, while local communities may be involved in planning through ‘consultation’, such consultation offers limited opportunity for discussions between local communities and other stakeholders. Several mechanisms have been used to improve the balance in stakeholder participation processes. For example, citizens have been involved in tourism planning decision-making through “steering committees” whereby their representation on such committees provide input and advice for planners (Inskeep, 1994, p. 9). “Public hearings” enable the wider community to be informed and to express their views about proposed plans (Li et al. 2020, p.1), while seminars may be conducted after a plan is developed (Bobbio, 2019). However, the timing of such public hearings and seminars may render them ineffective as a collaborative platform and they are more often seen as a mechanism for informing stakeholders about plans or decisions.

There is, therefore, room for strengthening consultation and discussion with affected stakeholders in tourism planning models as well as for more inclusive models to ensure sustainability (Araujo and Bramwell, 1999; Bramwell, 2010; Waligo et al. 2013; Alshboul, 2016). Bramwell (2010) contends that stakeholders should be involved at every stage of tourism planning, not just at the initial stage, but also at the implementation stage. To overcome the weaknesses in stakeholder participation in tourism planning models, Waligo et al. (2013) proposed a ‘multi-stakeholder involvement management framework’. This framework involves three strategic levels: attraction, integration and management of stakeholder involvement and addresses issues such as stakeholder capacity for involvement and implementation, stakeholder relationship management and monitoring their involvement. Similarly, Marzuki and Hay (2013) proposed their Public Participation Framework, as discussed in section 2.6.1, to ensure a more inclusive and effective

stakeholder participation process. Serra et al. (2016) explores how the concept of ‘Creating Shared Value’, can help tourism organisations to help develop more sustainable destinations. Shared value creation, an organisational management concept, is about organisations creating economic value in ways that addresses societal needs and challenges and thereby creating value for the society (Porter and Kramer, 2011 as cited in Serra et al. 2016). Social progress therefore becomes an impetus for creating long term economic value. In order to create shared value, Serra et al. (2016) emphasises that tourism organisations must treat social engagement as a long-term investment which is important for business success. Hence, the debate on strengthening stakeholder participation especially by the public and local communities is far from over and new approaches continue to evolve to address the limitations.

2.7.2 Structure of Stakeholder Participation

In operationalising stakeholder participation in tourism planning, decisions must be made on how to structure the participation in order to get the most out of the process. This requires determining the scope and extent of stakeholder collaboration as well as the degree to which consensus is expected to emerge (Bramwell and Sharman (1999). The scope of participation necessitates decisions on identifying stakeholder groups and the extent to which each stakeholder group is involved in decision-making. Decisions on the intensity of participation entails deciding how much effort stakeholders are expected to put into participation including extent of direct interaction versus dissemination of information, degree of openness and transparency required and the degree to which participants understand and learn from each other. The degree to which consensus emerges requires setting of realistic expectations about the extent to which participants are willing to accept that not everyone will agree about all aspects. If stakeholders are reluctant to participate, decisions on whether they be given incentives to participate should be considered. Some authors contend that stakeholders will be more involved if they expect benefits from collaboration, such as influencing decisions, or getting rewards for their business (Jamal and Getz, 1995).

2.7.3 Practical Constraints Versus Inclusiveness

A practical disadvantage of stakeholder participation in tourism planning is that decision-making often takes much longer with the collaborative approach especially at the development and implementation stages of tourism plans, because it takes more time to

obtain opinions and build consensus among stakeholders (Richard, 2002). The greater the number of participants, the more likely are conflicts of opinion so stakeholder participation may exacerbate or even create conflicts (Jamal and Getz, 1999). Moreover, it might not be possible to have all stakeholder issues considered at the same time (Timothy, 1998). It is, therefore, important to consider how to strike a balance between delays in decision making, obtaining opinions and conflict resolution.

Another signification challenge is that stakeholder participation is costly and takes considerable financial and human resources to conduct (Marzuki, 2015). Consensus is especially difficult to achieve when there is a shortage of resources, including mediator skills (Wanner, 2019). Hence optimal management of the resources that are required for the participative process including mediation is key.

2.8 Stakeholder Participation in Developing Countries

Marzuki et al. (2012) notes that by the 1980's, tourism development in developing countries had grown exponentially, fuelled by international and domestic investments. However, such growth was most often not accompanied by tourism planning and hence led to uncontrolled development socio-cultural tensions (Kapera, 2018), and environmental degradation (Ehigiamusoe, 2020). Moreover, although their citizens did enjoy some economic benefits from tourism even without planning, these benefits were limited to blue collar jobs and petty trading (Tosun & Jenkins, 1996; France 1998). According to Yanes et al. (2019) the failure of the developing world to implement tourism plans is due to the lack of a holistic approach to tourism which connects environment, local people and the wider economy. As a result, while many developing countries have realised the value of the ecosystem for tourism development, they have failed to provide sufficient benefit for their local communities. Stakeholder participation could encourage a holistic approach to address this core issue (Jordan et al. 2013).

Developing countries are different from Western countries in terms of their cultural and political systems (Besley and Persson, 2014) and stakeholder participation in these countries can be constrained by structural and operational weaknesses relating to the government, other sectors and socio-cultural limitations (Tosun, 2000). For example, developing countries may not have the experience of involving stakeholders in policy decisions (Sakitri, 2018; Van Nguyen et al. 2020; Carlos et al. 2013) argue that developing countries have weak stakeholder

participation systems and practices and the roles of stakeholders need to be looked at from the context and actual experience in these countries. Likewise, Adu-Ampong (2017) contend that there is a need to study how emerging destinations implement stakeholder participation in practice and how much consultation is needed in these countries.

Several authors note a lack of relevant studies on stakeholder participation in new destinations especially those with different economic and political systems (Wang et al. 2010; Ying et al. 2015; Adu-Ampong, 2017). Developing countries face political, social and cultural challenges that hinder tourism planning and implementation especially in involving stakeholders in the decision-making process (Bello et al. 2018; Wanner and Pröbstl-Haider, 2019). Tourism planning and development in countries like Turkey and Indonesia are reported to ignore the needs of local communities due to the centralised government decision-making process and inherent administrative weaknesses (Tosun, 1998; Timothy, 1999). In their study of public participation in Malaysia, Mazruki et al. (2012) found that public participation was merely a “tokenism” with a one-way communication dominating the participation with limited opportunity for public participation within the regulatory framework. They identified four main problems in community participation in planning in Malaysia: (1) inadequate information and lack of understanding by community participants (2) ineffective implementation of the participation process (3) lack of engagement by the community or negative attitudes and (4) deliberate exclusion of some members and groups from the participation processes. They also noted that in Malaysia public participation is limited to the early stages of planning and none of the decisions taken involve the public.

The selection of stakeholders, government and organisational culture, and unequal power distributions can all lead to ineffective planning. A study by Ioannides (1995) of Akamas, Cyprus found that the government deliberately follows a policy of excluding the residents in any planning related discussions to avoid conflicts between stakeholder groups. As a result, several problems resulting from the exclusion were identified. According to Fraser et al. (2006), a study on Kalahari Rangelands in Botswana suggests that one of the drawbacks of the ‘top-down’ model of tourism planning is that the government is unable to protect the grazing land by regulating land use. The study suggested that stakeholder participation in tourism planning could help in solving these issues by drawing on local knowledge in deciding standards and laws for grazing and land use.

Given the findings that the voices of stakeholders in the planning and development process are often not balanced even if stakeholder participation is integrated, there is further room for exploring these aspects in developing countries. As noted by Li et al. (2020) the discourse on stakeholder participation continues and is still evolving rather than remaining constant and it is necessary to understand how the discourse occurs in different contexts, particularly in developing countries. Moreover, such discourse must reflect the differences in power and knowledge of the different actors participating in these countries.

2.9 Tourism Planning in Non-Democratic Developing Countries

Not all developing countries are democratic, non-democratic countries considerably vary from the democratic ones in their governments systems, involvement of non-governmental stakeholder in policy making, and their legal systems and structures (Bellinger, 2020). Therefore, the problems of stakeholder participation in tourism planning in developing countries are compounded when the system of governance is non-democratic. While there are many studies on tourism development in developing countries, few examine tourism planning or stakeholder participation in non-democratic developing countries. According to Pooyan et al. (2019), there are gaps in the literature on promoting sustainable tourism development in developing countries that researchers need to focus on. One way such a gap could be addressed as suggested by Alshboul (2016), is by developing a holistic model for developing countries where the systems are mostly top-down. Few studies have been conducted on stakeholder participation or tourism planning in developing countries that do not have a democratic system of political governance.

In one such study, Al-Tokhais and Thapa (2019) examined stakeholder perspectives towards national parks and protected areas in Saudi Arabia, which is a monarchy. They interviewed representatives of public, private, and non-governmental organisations from the tourism and conservation community and found that most participants had a negative attitude towards the management of these parks and protected areas which were also eco-tourism attractions. Despite the importance of grazing land and natural resources for the livelihood of rural communities in Saudi Arabia, there is uncontrolled exploitation of these resources and residents and NGOs were not included in any way in planning or managing the parks and protected areas. Furthermore, any initiatives and activities proposed by the public or NGOs were not considered by the officials. Centralised decision making, lack of appropriate government expertise and knowledge, lack of awareness of tourism concepts among all

stakeholders and lack of appropriate engagement of the private sector were identified as problems within the planning and management systems. However, the study found that despite respondents' lack of a deeper understanding of tourism, they did have a strong opinion that tourism should be developed holistically integrating natural, cultural, and socio-economic components. The authors recommended that the combined knowledge from all stakeholders should be integrated within the tenets of eco-tourism and that key stakeholders should work together to identify priorities and build collaboration to take part in decision-making. Eshliki and Kaboudi (2012) found that the tourism planning and decision-making system in Iran is top-down and scattered among different sectors. This combined with the lack of stakeholder participation created problems in aligning and coordinating the different sectors resulting in a host of issues such as traffic congestions, damage to green landscapes and disturbance to local people's lives. Al Haija (2011) notes that the tourism development process in Jordanian historic towns has been constrained by socio-cultural conflicts between local inhabitants and the tourism industry. Jordan's development plans for all sectors are developed in collaboration with the private sector primarily because of deficiency in government funds. Hence, the Jordanian economy is led by the private sector which proposes the strategy for each sector and the government facilitates their requirements. The study reports that this dominance in decision-making by the private sector and the government although enabling faster decisions and less bureaucracy, has led to several problems in relation to the tourism sector. These include few benefits to local communities, adverse impact on rural and Bedouin habitats, displacement of communities from their original habitats and conflict of interest between private sector, foreign aid and public services. Al Haija (2011) recommends that the Jordanian strategic, regional and urban tourism planning systems are reviewed so that there is appropriate diversity in the interventions required to meet local needs.

A study by Cao (2015) in China finds that all levels of the government will have to overcome a short-term economic gains mind-set and deep-rooted practices to see the benefits of sustainable tourism. The study also notes that more practical, and rational institutional arrangements at governmental levels are needed with clearly defined roles and responsibilities to be effective. One of the recommendations made by Cao (2015) in order to overcome the weakness of the multistranded structure of the Chinese governmental structure, is the establishment of a national level consolidated and authoritative tourism institution that

can make and implement overall tourism development strategies, channel information, and coordinate and balance different interests.

Developing countries with a non-democratic governance systems present unique challenges to the democratic concept of stakeholder participation, as it is the norm in such countries for the government to impose their decisions. Such unilateral decision making in the case of the tourism sector will not result in the expected gains while causing many unanticipated problems. As the concept of stakeholder participation is based on western theories of democracy, it is worthwhile to understand how it could be applied to tourism development in emerging destinations that do not follow democratic principles in public life.

2.10 Oman: An Emerging Tourism Destination

To examine how the concept of stakeholder participation can be applied or enhanced in a non-democratic and developing country like Oman, the evolution of the tourism sector in Oman and the national context must be understood. The next sections in this chapter analyse the emergence of tourism as a key sector for diversification for the Omani national economy and the extent of wider stakeholder participation in the government decision-making process.

Located in the south eastern part of the Arabian Peninsula, Oman shares borders with Saudi Arabia, Yemen and the United Arab Emirates. Oman's governance system is monarchical; the Sultan is the head of the state as well as the government and is assisted by the cabinet (Henderson, 2015) whose role is to implement the Sultan's directions. The literature indicates that historically, Omanis were amongst the first civilisations that engaged in tourism (Inskip, 1991). Omanis travelled to India, China, Africa, and other continents trading in frankincense and spices more than two thousand years ago; today, however, Oman relies on oil as its key source for national revenues (Belwal and Belwal, 2010; Haque et al.2016).

Winckler (2007) attributes Oman's delay in developing the tourism industry to the late discovery of oil compared to its neighbouring GCC countries. He argues that the delay in its oil discovery meant that Oman chose to first use its oil revenues to meet its basic development needs rather than develop other economic sectors. Prior to the 1950s, Sultan Said Bin Taimur, did not open up the country to oil exploration and exports. After he was succeeded by his Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said in 1970, oil exploration and exports increased rapidly. The resulting revenues were invested in services, infrastructure, education, health, transportation systems, and other sectors. In the 1980s, Sultan Qaboos decided on an economic

diversification strategy due to the fall in international oil prices and to reduce dependence on oil (Gopakumar, 1995; Belwal and Belwal, 2010; SCP, 2016). However, at the time, tourism was not one of the options considered for diversification as the country was not ready to receive tourists. Winckler (2007) provides two reasons for this: first, the physical infrastructure was not in place and second, the Omanis were not prepared to open up the country to tourists due to their fear of harming their culture and local identity.

The move to consider tourism as a potential economic sector happened gradually with many stops and turns along the way. The government officially started considering tourism as an activity in 1973 when the token responsibility for tourism was given to the Ministry of Information (Habsi, 2004). In 1974, the Ministry of Heritage and Culture was created and took over tourism-related activities but in 1975, the responsibility was moved to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. However, it was only in 2005, that a National Tourism Development Plan was developed with the stated intention to “develop tourism as an important and sustainable socio- economic sector in a manner that reflects the Sultanate’s historic, cultural and environmental heritage and sense of traditional hospitality and values” (Henderson 2015, p.354). Shortly thereafter, in 2006, the Ministry of Tourism (MoT) was created with the sole responsibility for leading tourism development. This was a clear signal that the government had identified tourism as an important sector for economic diversification, with the potential to contribute to business growth and balanced social and economic development (Ministry of National Economy, 2007). As observed by Buhalis (2000), designating a single government department to lead tourism planning is essential, especially where there is more than one organisation involved in planning, as in the case of Oman.

Today, Oman considers the diversification of the economy as critical to reducing its dependence on oil and natural gas and tourism is a key sector that is expected to contribute to the diversification. Haque et al. (2016) notes a positive link in Oman between government investments and the growth in tourism and employment opportunities and GDP as in the case of other countries. This led the government to focus on efforts to significantly increase the contribution of the tourism sector to the country’s GDP (Aulia and Almandhari, 2015). In 2015, the tourism and hospitality sector provided around 111,500 jobs which is about 6% of the total jobs available in the country (Haque et al. 2016). According to the Oman Tourism

Strategy 2040, tourism is expected to contribute 7.4% of GDP by 2040 (Ministry of Tourism, 2014).

Oman is expected to be one of the fastest growing tourism destination in the Middle East and this is reflected in the development of new tourism infrastructure and tourism products in the country (Aulia and Al Mandhari, 2015), as well as the presence of international tourism investors in the hotel industry (Aulia and Al-Mandhari, 2015). According to Al-Amri (2008), Oman has cultural and geographical attractions that reflect the uniqueness of the destination in comparison to its neighbours in the Middle East. With its very mild climate in the winter months, it attracts western tourists who wish to escape their cold winters (Belwal and Belwal, 2010), while in the summer, it attracts GCC residents to the Dhofar region in the south, who wish to escape the summer heat in their countries. Moreover, in comparison to the modernised and urbanised cities in other Gulf countries, Henderson (2015) notes that Muscat has retained much of its traditional architecture. Other attributes include the long and clean coastal line, geographic and geological features, heritage sites, the less populated interior regions, the welcoming nature of the people, the political stability and the security and safety of the country (Belwal and Belwal, 2010; Al Hashim, 2015). Its natural and cultural attractions includes its castles, forts, mosques, traditional markets (souqs), mountains, wadis (valleys), deserts, canyons, caves, sand dunes, islands, lagoons, nature reserves, wild life, islands, water springs, world heritage sites, and geological and archaeological sites (Al-Hashim, 2015). Although an Islamic country, Oman is noted for its religious and social tolerance and philosophy of non-violence (Henderson, 2015; Jones and Ridout, 2005). Oman markets itself as an authentic Arabian visitor experience, stressing its culture, heritage, nature and adventure (Ministry of Tourism, 2014). The Ministry of Tourism targets high spending Western, Indian and Gulf tourist segments, preferring a niche tourism strategy as opposed to mass tourism in order to limit any adverse impact on its societal values, culture and heritage (Feighery, 2012; Henderson, 2015).

However, according to the government's own reports (TANFEED, 2017, p. 80), despite Oman's tourism resources, it has not achieved the expected returns from these resources and nor has it utilised its strategic location of proximity to three continents, Asia, Africa, and Europe. As a result, tourism contributed only about 2.2% of GDP from 2010 to 2015. The TANFEED (2017) report highlights issues such as shortages in the number and range of hotel rooms available, low performance of air transport, limited links between land and air

infrastructure, shortage of qualified people in tourism, and strict visa regulations as key constraints. According to Al Balushi and Wise (2017), Oman has not yet realised the potential economic and social value of its tourism sector. This is partly because of environmental and social factors and despite having strong environmental laws in place, the environmental impacts of tourism are not studied. They note that there is need for further research on how to balance the requirements of sustainable development namely environment, social and economic impacts of tourism. The Omani society is highly influenced by the Islamic religion, and although Omanis are friendly and hospitable, they are quite conservative in nature and proud of their ancestral habits and way of life. This makes them more inclined to resist opening up socially and culturally. Religious beliefs also hold some behaviours as taboo such as consuming liquor and pork, and dress that is revealing or uncovers parts of the body (AL Haija, 2011). Hence, behaviour which may be the norm in many countries can irritate conservative Omanis and local communities (Henderson, 2015). As noted by Carr (2002), many travellers behave differently and more freely when traveling than they normally do, for example, drinking more and engaging in more sexual acts. There are severe penalties in place in Oman for drunkenness and other behaviour that does not respect local sensitivities. Friel (2002) observes that tourist behaviour can cause huge conflicts with local people due to differences in culture or by threatening their environment or means of livelihood. A study on Misfat Al-Abriyin village in Oman by Mershen (2007) showed that tourists littered and dumped waste in the water used by locals thereby polluting their precious water resources and annoying local people. The study criticised entrepreneurs who had ‘commodified’ the local culture to attract western tourists, for example, by creating western romantic themes based on the local culture and recommended that young Omanis need to be trained and educated about their country’s traditions so that they do not lose knowledge of important local values.

Conservatism and religious implies mean that the general public does have reservations about tourism; this also results in most Omanis actively avoiding employment in the tourism sector (Bontenbal, and Aziz, 2013). Although Oman aims to achieve high economic and social returns from tourism, local Omanis form only around 12% of the workforce in the tourism sector (Ministry of Manpower, 2019). The government’s Omanisation policy of enforcing recruitment of Omanis by the private and government sectors, present key obstacles in tourism development in Oman (Pourmohammadi, 2014). Omanisation is a government policy of replacing expatriate or non-Omani employees with Omanis by enforcing

Omanisation quotas in all sectors (Al-Nahdi, 2016). Due to the low numbers of Omanis working in in tourism, decision-makers and planners also lack understanding of how local stakeholders perceive the gains versus risks of tourism in Oman (Al Balushi and Wise, 2017).

Scholz (2018) argues that Oman's low tourism benefits are due to issues with the planning and decision-making process. These include, use of public resources by elites and the more privileged for their own personal benefit, the slow progress in economic diversification due to the reliance on oil and high unemployment which is between 12-17% with expatriates being employed. Although Oman has started major planning and development activities in tourism in order to replace its dependence on oil, it is quite evident that the local population are still reluctant to embrace tourism. Hence if tourism planning and development is to provide the desired results for Oman, there is a need to examine the scope for stakeholder participation. The next section examines how the government of Oman approaches tourism planning and the extent of stakeholder participation in its planning process currently.

2.11 The Concept of Stakeholder Participation in Oman

The literature reveals that the democratic tradition is the root of stakeholder participation; therefore, it is very important to consider the Omani political context when considering stakeholder participation. Although, Oman has been a monarchy since the establishment of the Al Said dynasty in 1741 (Jones and Ridout, 2005), before that, the country had democratic traditions. Ghubash, (2006) in his book 'Oman - The Islamic Democratic Tradition', notes that Oman developed a unique system of democratic governance which lasted for 1,000 years from the 8th century to the 18th century AD and is claimed to be the only known Islamic democratic system or A'shura.

Philips and Hunt (2017, p.645) observes that the political system in Oman during the last 50 years has been characterised by its "stability, internal cohesion, relative prosperity, and ability to maintain genial diplomatic relations with its important neighbours". In the 1970s. Oman was comparable to Yemen today in terms of its lack of basic infrastructure, schools, and healthcare. Philips and Hunt (2017) chronicle the remarkable progress Oman made from having only one hospital, 10 km of paved roads and three schools in 1970 to being ranked in the top percentile in terms of performance of health care systems. human capital development and other indicators by the 1990s. All the progress that Oman has achieved is credited to the vision and planning of His Majesty, Sultan Qaboos Bin Said who came to the throne in 1970.

Sultan Qaboos focused attention on national unity communications, social welfare and development, and had the resources to do this due to the dramatic increase in oil prices since the 1970s. However, as noted by Philips and Hunt (2017), the rapid development was also enabled by a significant degree of centralised authoritarian control, which has been a feature of Oman's political system.

The Sultan heads the Omani government and enforces his decisions through Royal decrees (2019). He also holds the position of Prime Minister and Chairs the Ministerial Council and the Oman Council (MoTC, 2019). The next level of the formal decision-making hierarchy is the Ministerial Council and includes all Ministers. All decisions regarding national plans and their approval are taken by the Ministerial Council. Until 2020, the implementation of national level plans was the responsibility of the Supreme Council of Planning (SPC) which was referred to as the 'chief executive body' of the country. In late 2020, a new Ministry for Economy was established to replace the SPC with representation in the Ministerial Council (MoF, 2020).

The Oman Council is composed of the State Council and A'shura Council which are advisory bodies and do not have decision-making power. However, the A'shura Council has publicly elected representatives, and therefore may be seen as a step towards democratising the governance process. The State Council members are either former government senior officials or with public profiles, such as, authors or tribal leaders, who are all appointed by His Majesty. The Ministerial Council and the State Council can refer draft plans for Ashura Council for recommendations. Kumar (2017) states that Sultan Qaboos worked towards establishing a more democratic culture in Oman by shifting people's commitments to their tribes into involvement in the government's machinery of decision-making. According to Scholz (2018), this democratic culture started with the inclusion of the public in government decision-making when tribal leaders joined the government in 1974. His Majesty also established the Consultative Council "an idea based on the British model Magna Carta Libertatam" (Scholz, 2018, p.87). Tribal leaders along with government officials were appointed as members of this council and their role was to offer advice to the government, though without any authority to make decisions.

In 1991, the Ashura Council was established with fully elected members except for the chair who was appointed by his Majesty (Gopakumar, 1995; Scholz, 2018). It gained more power later and the chair was elected by the members of the council rather than being appointed by

the Sultan. Recent changes to the law have given Ashura members legislative authority and liberty to comment on government decision-making and to monitor government performance. Finally, the Municipal Councils were established which also include elected members the members of which represent their Wilayats, with responsibilities for municipal projects such as local roads, parks, and street lighting (Kumar, 2017; Scholz, 2018).

In 2011, along with the upheaval caused by the Arab Spring, there were demands from demonstrators in Oman for more participation in decision-making and this pushed the government to give more power to all elected councils in Oman (Kumar, 2017). There was a perception among the demonstrators that elected councils had too little power and that the government still dominated decision-making. Therefore, voter turnout at elections decreased from 76% in 2011 to 56% in 2015 (Scholz, 2018). Al-Subhi (2017) writes that although there is no democracy, nevertheless the consultative bodies such as the Ashura, the State and Municipal Councils and the regional Al-Bahar committees do advise the government about public opinion. However, Kumar (2017) finds that Omani respondents want more stakeholder participation in Oman's system of planning.

The Oman Tourism Strategy 2040, states that Oman's tourism industry must be sensitive to the needs of residents to ensure that tourism development is consistent with the unique Omani culture and is sustainable in the longer-term economically, environmentally, and socio-culturally. According to Al-Masroori (2006), this can only happen if all tourism industry stakeholders (government, developers and local-residents) collaborate in policy formulation, implementation and monitoring. This is also endorsed by Al-Amri (2008) who argues that in order to reflect and protect Oman's uniqueness which is a significant tourism strength, it is necessary that the community is involved in crafting tourism planning policies. If local residents are also involved in the process of tourism planning in Oman, their active involvement in the decision-making process can play an important role in avoiding problems that otherwise may occur in the future, (Al-Masroori, 2006; Al-Shaabi, 2011).

According to Al-Shaabi (2011) all stakeholders must work together and local residents must be further empowered, educated and consulted in order to derive increased benefits from tourism. Consultation is needed to align the views of people who are in many different sectors (Battaglia et al. 2012) and this requires some sort of a democratic platform for these sectors to discuss their interests together (Dredge, 2006). These aspirations to strengthen stakeholder participation may be able to draw not only on the current but limited elements of

stakeholder consultation in Oman's governance system, but also on the historic democratic heritage in the country's history.

An example of an Omani institution set up to facilitate community participation is the system of Sunan Al-Bahar Committees created in all coastal states to involve fisheries communities in the 'co-management' of the fisheries sector along with the government (Al-Subhi, 2017). This system was put in place after 1999, as the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries realised the difficulty of enforcing its rules without the cooperation of local communities. However, such participation has not been a feature of tourism-related planning and development activities undertaken by the government. Hence there are no formal mechanisms or regulations in place for stakeholder participation.

Watkins and Gioia (2015) find that there is a lack of research on stakeholder participation in tourism planning in Oman. The closest match is a PhD thesis entitled 'Managing Local Residents' Participation in Tourism Development in the Sultanate of Oman: A Case Study of The wave Muscat project' (Al-Shaaibi, 2011). Al-Shaaibi finds that the local community was not involved in any way the project. However, this study focused on participation by residents in project development, i.e., while the project was being built, and not on their participation in the initial planning or decision-making phases. Al-Shaaibi also finds that Oman is becoming more sympathetic to the notion of local community participation, which is regarded as an indispensable mechanism for sustainable tourism development (Okazaki, 2008).

However, Watkins and Gioia (2015) assert that it cannot be taken for granted that because stakeholder participation has worked elsewhere, it would also work in places like Oman considering its political, social, and cultural differences from democratic countries. According to Li (2006), systems for stakeholder participation must reflect local systems and respond to local challenges. One of these challenges is the lack of democratic norms in Oman's political system. Furthermore, if Oman is to introduce stakeholder participation into its system of tourism planning, it must find a way of doing so that does not add to its current lack of coordination in government processes. For instance, according to Al-Busaidi (2010), there are 2,831 archaeological heritage sites in Oman including World Heritage sites, which are managed by three main stakeholders, the government, the private sector, and the community; however, he finds that there is lack of cooperation and integration between these stakeholders. The World Bank cultural and heritage development report (2001) also

highlights the lack of coordination between sectors in Oman, in particular the lack of contact between communities and government (Al-Busaidi, 2010).

In 2014, the Ministry of Tourism hired a reputable international consultancy company called THR, which is based in Spain, to prepare the tourism strategy for Oman for the next 25 years. In 2016, the consultancy company produced a comprehensive 1,200-page report - the Oman Tourism Strategy 2040 (OTS 2040) – which outlined the existing features of tourism in Oman and the future Omani tourism strategy until 2040. However, OTS 2040 has not yet been implemented by the government for reasons which are not yet disclosed. It is worth considering whether increased stakeholder participation in the tourism planning system would speed up or slow down the implementation of OTS 2040. As noted by Al-Said (2019), Oman Vision 2020 which laid out the country's plan for economic diversification, has not yielded expected results.

In strengthening stakeholder participation in tourism planning in Oman, further questions that require consideration include: who are the relevant stakeholders? what should be the stakeholders' level and stage of engagement with the tourism planning system? i.e., how inclusive can the process be? how should tourism experts be involved? how can the public or local residents be involved in decisions that affect them? should there be a single governmental body in charge of the tourism planning process? These are issues that will be answered in the remaining chapters of the thesis.

2.12 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the literature on the importance of tourism planning and stakeholder participation to sustainable tourism development. Significant progress has been made particularly in developed countries to enhance stakeholder participation through evolving and new approaches to planning. Among these approaches the most inclusive form in terms of stakeholder participation is the collaborative approach. Although there is consensus on the importance of stakeholder participation for the sectorial tourism industry, there are inherent challenges with stakeholder participation that can reduce its effectiveness and these challenges must be considered carefully, especially in relation to developing countries. As these concepts, originated in the developed world, there will be challenges and constraints in implementing them in developing countries which lack proper systems for tourism planning let alone stakeholder participation. Decision-making systems in developing

countries may be more top-down than in the west and may be less sympathetic to western notions of democracy.

There is also a lack of research on stakeholder participation in tourism planning in non-democratic developing countries such as Oman. In the case on non-democratic countries the challenges they face in implementing effective participation may be different to other developing countries. In authoritarian Middle Eastern Muslim countries in particular, religion is tightly connected to political systems and are subject to the rule of the monarch. Developing stakeholder participation approaches for such contexts can further enrich the literature on stakeholder participation and Oman presents a good case study to examine viable approaches to stakeholder participation in such countries.

Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the research design, the data collection, data analysis methods and techniques that were employed to achieve the objectives presented in chapter one. The next section of this chapter lays out the philosophical stance or paradigm on which this study is based. In so doing, the ontological and epistemological perspectives that inform the constructivist epistemology adopted in this study are discussed. This is followed by an account of the qualitative and exploratory research design of this study, after which the sampling strategy and methods used for collecting the data at each stage of the research process are presented. The critical discourse analysis method employed for analysing the data is explained, and lastly, the issues of validity and reliability of the findings are addressed.

3.2 Philosophical Stance

All research begins with an examination of the fundamental perspectives that inform and influence the research design, methodology and methods employed in each study. Assumptions about the nature of reality (ontology) and how knowledge is created (epistemology) are fundamental to the nature of research in the social sciences. Ontology and epistemology are interconnected and understanding these philosophical underpinnings of research allow researchers to better clarify their research design in line with their objectives (Easterby-Smith et al. 2002). Ontology addresses the basic question of what the nature of social reality is (Lawson; 2019), or what actually exists that we can acquire knowledge about (Moon and Blackman, 2017). Ontology, therefore, informs the nature of reality assumed by the researcher (Veal, 2017). Epistemology, on the other hand, deals with the sources of knowledge, or how we create knowledge (Bryman, 2008). It provides the philosophical grounding for deciding what kind of knowledge we use and how to ensure its adequacy and legitimacy (Crotty, 1998). In other words, epistemology allows the researcher to classify what constitutes or does not constitute knowledge and therefore has a direct link to the research methodology.

The central question here is whether social reality and social entities should be considered as objective (positivist epistemology) or subjective (interpretivist or constructivist epistemology). In social research, positivism is rooted in a realist or objective ontology which

considers that the reality is objective and is out there to be discovered; positivism requires researcher to assume neutrality in describing the world and uses a deductive or theory testing approach to create knowledge. Positivism seeks to establish relationships between variables through hypothesis testing and tends to use quantitative analysis to arrive at objective findings which are generalisable (Furlong & Marsh, 2007). From the perspective of the positivist paradigm, internal validity and rigorous controls are paramount.

On the other hand, interpretivism or constructivism is rooted in a relative or subjective ontology which takes the view that reality is socially mediated or constructed; it considers that knowledge and reality is constructed among social actors and is not out there ready to be found (Crotty, 1998; Moon and Blackman, 2017). Within this belief system, as Miller and Brewer (2003) argue, it is individuals who make or construct ‘universal law’ out of their contact with the existing world; individuals also produce their understanding of the sense of things in distinctive ways. Interpretivists prefer to use qualitative approaches as they focus more on the meanings that actions have while examining the relationships between social phenomena. Constructivists seek to conduct their research in a normal setting as possible and so consider external validity as key. A third category, ‘critical realists’ take the midpoint between positivism and interpretivism. While they share the positivist ontology of an objective reality, they take the interpretivist epistemological view that knowledge structures and meaning can be socially constructed.

This research study takes the interpretivist or constructionist stance that social reality is that which is constructed among social actors and therefore is subjective. “Constructionism provides a methodology for investigating the beliefs and viewpoints of individual respondents about the issues under discussion” (Hunt, 1991 as cited in Al-Balushi, 2008, p.189). According to King and Horrocks, (2010), constructivism views language as a key vehicle through which social reality and particular versions of events are constructed and therefore knowledge is created through verbal exchange; the researcher becomes a co-producer of knowledge. Constructivism therefore offers a methodology for studying the language people use to make sense of things. It interprets discourse in terms of the view that language is a way of constructing realities in which researchers locate themselves ‘politically’ to inform us about reality from their own perspective, i.e., interpreting the world through their own lenses.

As Healy et al. (2012) argue that our view of the concept of stakeholder participation is not static but is an evolving process that requires input from different stakeholders to be constructed. Understanding how stakeholders present themselves, interact and express their individual realities gives meaning to stakeholder participation. In this study, the researcher constructively explores stakeholders' perceptions of reality by investigating tourism stakeholders' discourse and arriving at relevant meaning and conclusions about tourism planning and stakeholder participation in it, and its relevance to Oman. The researcher is an insider in the Omani society as well as the tourism sector which provides a good base for him to observe the realities and issues through the lenses of tourism stakeholders in Oman and thereby construct the meanings, they provide to the concept of participation within tourism development initiatives.

3.3 Research Aim and Objectives

Research aims, and more specifically, research objectives, influence the methodology or research design and methods used for data collection (Phillips & Burbules, 2000). Hence, the aim and objectives of this study are at the core of its methodological choices.

The aim of this study is:

To examine critically the applicability of stakeholder participation in tourism planning efforts in a non-democratic and emerging tourism destination, namely, the Sultanate of Oman, in order to strengthen sustainable tourism development.

The study seeks to propose a framework for engaging stakeholders within the tourism planning process which addresses the identified weaknesses and challenges in tourism planning and implementation in Oman. It examines how the stakeholder participation concept with its roots in the democratic and participative traditions, can be applied in tourism planning processes in societies which are not democratic in their governance.

As mentioned in Chapter One, this research study has the following three objectives:

Objective 1: To identify the weaknesses and challenges in the current tourism planning process in Oman.

Objective 2: To analyse stakeholder perspectives on a participative and inclusive approach to tourism planning and development in Oman.

Objective 3: To develop an integrated framework for tourism planning and stakeholder participation for Oman that addresses identified weakness and strengthens sustainability.

3.4 Research Design

In line with the constructivist paradigm discussed earlier, this study will use a qualitative methodology to collect and analyse data in order to examine stakeholder perspectives on the tourism planning process and the meaning and the importance respondents attach to the concept of stakeholder participation. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), qualitative methodologies enable researchers to interpret phenomena in the social world by understanding the meanings different stakeholder groups bring to issues, rather than investigating how representative their views are of the population by quantifying their responses. The purpose is not to generalise or test a hypothesis, but rather to explore and understand participants' viewpoints to gain an insight into what participation is like in Oman and how it can be strengthened. As argued by Al Droushi (2017, p.97), social science researchers can explore phenomena in their natural and normal setting to understand and better explain what "meaning do people bring to these phenomena".

A main criticism of some models of stakeholder participation in tourism planning is that they failed to identify stakeholders whose input and involvement are required for effective decision making (Moscardo, 2011). The following social actors can be regarded as stakeholders in tourism planning and development: government organisations, companies, environmental organisations, local people of host communities (Chase et al. 2012), special interest groups including NGOs (Marzuki et al. 2012), as well as media professionals and academics (Saftic 2011). Swarbrooke's (2010) classification of tourism stakeholders includes the government, host communities, tourism business, tourists, and other groups. The main stakeholder groups that were included in the study were the government, local community representatives, private and government sector tourism businesses, environmental NGOs, academics, and the media. Tourists as a stakeholder group were not directly included in the study; however, their perceptions were indirectly sought through the travel agencies and tour guides who interact with tourists on a daily basis.

When examining stakeholder participation, it is also necessary to understand what the desired level or extent of stakeholder participation is. There are three stages of public participation

that are common to well-known typologies of participation in tourism planning, namely, Brager's & Specht's typology (1973), Pretty's typology (1995) and, Arnstein's typology (1996). These stages are information; consultation; and empowerment. Accordingly, this study examined stakeholder views on participation at the information level where information is disseminated to the public, the consultation stage where public opinion is sought; and the empowerment stage where the public shares or even may take control of the planning process through collaboration and joint decision making.

Government officials, tourism experts and tourism business organisations in Oman have considerable knowledge and experience of the sector. This study is focused on analysing their views in scope and depth, rather than estimating their representativeness. Methods such as in-depth interviews give much freedom to participants to elaborate on their views (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2012) and this is important as participants may have very different perspectives on the challenges and issues involved in tourism planning in Oman. Moreover, there is a lack of studies and information on stakeholder participation and tourism planning in Oman (Al-Masrori, 2011) so data from key informant interviews will offer new knowledge.

The first stage of the research design was the review of literature to understand the theoretical underpinnings, contexts and discussions surrounding tourism planning and stakeholder participation. In the second stage, a critical discourse analysis of two longer-term tourism planning documents prepared by the Omani government was carried out. This helped to understand the tourism planning process in Oman which is relevant to the first objective of the study. The next stage involved the collection of primary data from interviews and was divided into two phases. The sample of interviewees included senior government officials from different ministries, CEOs, and managers of tourism companies (including entrepreneurs, small and medium business enterprises), local community leaders, elected Municipal Council members, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), media professionals, and academics. In the first phase of data collection, in-depth semi-structured interviews, or key informant (KIs) interviews were carried out with representatives of all stakeholder groups. The KI interviews, were designed to gain understanding of stakeholder perceptions of the tourism planning process and explore issues identified in the document analysis in greater depth (Molina-Azorín and Font, 2016, Subedi, 2016).

In the second phase of data collection, focus group discussions with each stakeholder group were conducted to seek feedback on two illustrations of stakeholder participation in tourism

planning. These illustrations were created by the researcher based on the document analysis and stakeholder input from the first phase. Table 3 below presents a summary of the Research Design until the end of the data collection stage.

Phase	Research Focus	Research Method Employed
1.	Review of Literature: Stakeholder participation in Tourism Planning (theoretical and practical implications)	Secondary data analysis
2.	Document Analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding the tourism planning process • Identifying tourism stakeholders in Oman 	Critical discourse analysis of OTS 2040 and Oman Vision 2020
3.	Pre-test of Interview Questions to enhance clarity and suitability	Face-to-face semi-structured interviews
4.	Primary Data Collection: Phase 1 Perspectives of stakeholders on the current tourism planning process and stakeholder participation	Face-to-face semi-structured interviews in Muscat and Dhofar regions
5.	Primary Data Collection: Phase 2 Feedback from stakeholders on the illustrated planning processes	Face-to-face focus group discussions and interviews in Muscat and Dhofar regions

Table 3: Stages of the Research Data Collection Process

3.5 Geographical Location of the Study

Although the focus of this study is on stakeholder participation in tourism planning in Oman as a whole, the geographical location of stakeholders is confined to two of the main tourism regions or governorates of Oman: Muscat and Dhofar. They are the biggest of the 11 governorates of Oman (MoI, 2020), and their selection is appropriate for the purposes of this study for the following reasons. First, there are differences in size and political importance between Muscat and Dhofar. Muscat is the capital city of Oman, with all national level government bodies located in Muscat. Since the governance system in Oman is centralized,

it is not feasible to study the planning system without having the centre for decision-making involved in the study. By contrast, Dhofar is much less central than Muscat, but it occupies about one third of Oman's land mass, which makes it by far the largest governorate in the country (MoI, 2020). Secondly, there is significant tourism development in both Muscat and Dhofar governorates (Alkamali et al. 2017). They have the largest capacity in the country in terms of hotel and lodging capacity for tourists with 12,106 rooms in Muscat and 3,576 rooms in Dhofar in 2018 (MoT, 2017). Together, the total of 15,682 rooms in these two governorates, compares to just 6,500 in all the other nine governorates combined, i.e., Muscat and Dhofar provide approximately 71% of the lodging capacity in Oman.

Thirdly, according to THR (2016), tourism development in Oman has been prioritised to develop in some governorates before others, in which, Muscat and Dhofar are among the first along with A'Dakhiliyah and South A'Sharqiyah governorates. Fourthly, there is a geographical difference between the two governorates. Muscat is in the north and has much hotter weather in summer, like the rest of the northern governorates of Oman, whereas Dhofar in the south of Oman has a cooler and damper climate, thus providing different tourism attractions. During the monsoon season in the summer, when the temperature in much of the Middle East rises to above 40 degree Celsius, the temperature in many areas of Dhofar remains under 30 degrees (Hildebrandt et al. 2007). Muscat and Dhofar therefore represent very different kinds of tourism experiences, which may have potentially different implications in terms of tourism planning and stakeholder perspectives.

Furthermore, there are some religious differences between Muscat and Dhofar. The Islamic doctrine in Muscat is mainly Ibadhi, whereas Dhofar is primarily Sunni (Lewis, 2015). As the most dominant doctrines in Oman are Ibadi and Sunni, these two governorates can serve as representative of both religious and cultural segments. Knowing that the past democratic history of Oman was basically driven by the Ibadhi system, it would be interesting if these aspects create difference in stakeholder views between Muscat and Dhofar. The above reasons combined make the choice of Muscat and Dhofar as the geographical locations for this study ideal; together they reflect the diversity of Oman.

3.6 Sampling Strategy

The success of a research project, particularly one that involves interviews with stakeholders, depends greatly on the sampling strategy adopted (Cohen et al. 2007). This study adopted a

purposive sampling strategy where the intention is to involve participants who can offer useful insights to the issues under study. Following classifications of tourism stakeholders by Chase et al. (2012), Marzuki et al. (2012), Saftic and Luk (2011) and Swarbrooke's (2001), the researcher identified six stakeholder groups in Oman who were relevant to the tourism sector. These were the local community, government, private sector (tourism businesses), academia, media, and NGOs. Representatives or participants were then selected for each stakeholder group. Many of the participants were identified by the document analysis of the Oman Tourism Strategy 2040 (OTS 2040) and MoT records such as lists of companies and annual reports of activities. All the stakeholder groups were involved in or relevant to tourism including government organisations that have roles in tourism related activities, government and private sector business, small and medium establishments and entrepreneurs, environmental NGOs, media members familiar with the tourism sector, academia, and the broader community represented by elected representatives and leaders. Some of the stakeholders identified had previously been involved in the OTS 2040 and/or in previous studies on Oman, such as Al-Shaabi (2011).

Furthermore, the researcher's own knowledge and experience of working in the tourism sector in Oman provided him with relevant information about tourism stakeholders in the country. Selection of the participants were also based on their willingness and availability to attend either the KI interviews or focus group discussions. Table 4 presents the sample size according to the method of data collection and geographical location of the study.

Method of Data Collection	Number of Participants		
	Muscat	Dhofar	Total
Phase 1: KI Interviews	29	16	45
Phase 2: Focus Group Discussions and Interviews	6 Focus Groups plus 1 Interview	5 Interviews	30
Total	54	21	75

Table 4: Participant Sample Size by Method of Data Collection and Location

The whole sample was categorised under six stakeholder groups. The MoT was asked to verify the list to identify any key stakeholders who were not included in the list and were left out inadvertently. In response, the MoT staff kindly provided a list of companies currently

operating in the sector. A final list was made of all participants to be contacted and the researcher contacted them to invite them for the KI interviews. In the first phase of data collection, a total of 45 KI interviews were undertaken with all relevant stakeholder groups as shown in Table 4. In the second phase of data collection, the potential participants for the focus groups were selected using the same approach. Representatives of five of the six stakeholder groups were contacted to check their willingness and availability to attend the focus group discussions. The exception was the NGO group as only one member was available, and she had already participated in the key informant interviews. A total of 30 participants were involved in the focus group discussions and interviews in the second phase. The data collection methods are discussed in further detail in section 3.7 in this chapter.

3.6.1 Stakeholders and Participants

1. **Government Stakeholders:** This sample included 19 government officials representing different government stakeholders in Oman out of the total 75 participants. The government is the main stakeholder in tourism in any country (Clarkson, 1995), as it is the government that develops tourism related policies, strategies and regulations (Morpeh and Hongliang, 2015). Senior level government officials who would be involved in planning related processes were identified and formed the sample for the KI Interviews and FGDs from each government body. There are several government organisations that play a role in tourism related decisions and activities in Oman. According to THR (2016), these organisations include:

- The Ministry of Tourism (MoT), which is responsible for governing all tourism issues and issuing tourism licenses for companies.
- The Ministry of the Environment (MoE), which is responsible for all environmental issues, including issuance of environmental licensing for tourism business, monitoring environmental practices, and conservation of natural resources.
- The Ministry of Housing (MoH), responsible for land allocation, and deciding land usage including land for tourism projects.
- The Ministry of Manpower (MoM), responsible for labour, Omanisation and licenses for work permits for expat workers.
- The Ministry of Water Resources (MoWR), responsible for all water resources

including the use of coastal areas, falajs, hot springs and creeks for tourism purposes.

- The Supreme Council of Planning (SCoP), responsible for coordinating all the country's strategic plans.
- The Governorates of Muscat and Dhofar Municipalities, responsible for building roads that connect tourism attractions in cities, lighting of these roads, public toilets, parks and other facilities and services. They are also responsible for issuing and renewing municipal licenses for commencing a business.

2. **Tourism Business Organisations:** A key stakeholder is tourism business organisations in Oman (Al-Busaidi, 2010; THR, 2016), which includes: travel and tour operators, hoteliers in 3, 4, and 5-star resorts, international tourism companies and small investors. Care was also taken to include small and medium business enterprises (SMEs) and entrepreneurs as well as government companies. Participants included chief executives, senior management staff, entrepreneurs, and owners of SMEs, as well as freelance tour guides.
3. **Local Community:** These are essentially the residents of Muscat and Dhofar who were represented by their elected representatives from the Municipal Council and local community or tribal leaders. The elected members of the Municipal Councils are responsible for the development of Wilayats [which are parts of governorates] in Oman. They represent community interests and work closely with the government in planning the facilities in each municipality which are also used by visiting tourists.
4. **Academia:** Academics play an important role in consultancies and share their knowledge and expertise. Tourism education providers and academic researchers are considered to be quite active stakeholders in tourism sector in Oman.
5. **Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs):** NGOs are valuable stakeholders that can provide valuable expertise on relevant environmental, issues and concerns (Bramwell and Lane, 2011) which are key to sustainable tourism planning and implementation.
6. **Media:** The media plays an important role in promoting tourism. Members of the media whose scope of reporting includes tourism were selected. Their work pertained to the whole of Oman and not just to one geographical location. The sample included CEOs and

managers of local publications, and media and public relations companies as well as journalists.

Stakeholder Group	Number of Participants	Comments
Government	19	2 participated in both the first and second phase of data collection
Tourism Businesses: Private sector	14	
Tourism Businesses: Entrepreneurs/SMEs	9	
Tourism Businesses: Semi Government companies	2	
Pension Fund Investor	1	
Local Community Leaders and Municipal Council Members	12	
Academics	11	1 participated in both the first and second phase of data collection
NGO	1	
Media	6	1 participated in both the first and second phase of data collection
Total	75	

Table 5: Number of Participants from Each Stakeholder Category

3.7 Data Collection Methods

3.7.1 Government Planning Documents

The use of government documents as a source of data is common in research in the social sciences (Bryman, 2012). Two national level planning documents were used as sources of data for this research, namely, Oman Vision 2020, and Oman Tourism Strategy (OTS) 2040.

These two documents represent official statements about the government's role and the role of other stakeholders involved in the planning process. They provide relevant and integral information on the current planning system in Oman, and therefore, can shed light on how planning is carried out at the national level, and if and how stakeholder participation, is integrated within the planning system. Hence, they are useful in understanding the official government perspective of the planning process including stakeholder participation. As these documents represent only the government's narrative of the planning process, they were critically analysed using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Thus, the document analysis addresses in part research question one, which is to identify the strengths and weaknesses in the current tourism planning process in Oman. The documentary data was supplemented with primary data collected from key stakeholders in order to develop a fuller and more accurate picture.

According to the Supreme Council for Planning, Oman Vision 2020 was prepared in 1995 and was intended to guide the Sultanate to a sustainable and diversified economy (<https://www.scp.gov.om/en>). Oman Vision 2020 encompasses all major economic sectors in the country, not just the tourism sector, and sets objectives for all sectors for the period 2000-2020. It also provides relevant information about why the government shifted its focus to tourism as a key sector for economic diversification. For the purposes of this study, only the sections of Oman Vision 2020 that pertained to the tourism sector or on planning in general were analysed. The document contains a lot of information that is not directly relevant to tourism or this study including an evaluation of the economic development in Oman before 2020 as well as road maps for the development of other economic sectors. These sections were not analysed for this study.

The second documentary source is the Oman Tourism Strategy (OTS) 2040 which is the latest and most significant document that is currently available for the future development of Oman's tourism sector up till 2040. This document contains very relevant and important information about the tourism sector in Oman and the different tourism stakeholders. It is, therefore, a good source for analysing if and how stakeholder participation was incorporated in planning and how participative and inclusive the strategic planning process was.

3.7.2 Pre-testing Phase

Before commencing with the primary data collection and interview stage, the interview questions were pre-tested. The pre-testing phase was carried out in Oman in June 2017. An interview guide with questions was developed through insights from the literature and the document analysis of Oman Vision 2020 and OTS 2040. These included questions about the tourism planning system in Oman, challenges in tourism planning and stakeholders experience with participation in planning. For example, the literature emphasises the importance of identifying and involving relevant stakeholders, so one of the questions that was included was ‘which stakeholders should participate in tourism planning in Oman’? Another question was ‘which organisation is responsible for tourism planning in Oman’? The interview guide with the list of questions was given to the thesis supervisors and feedback was received on the questions and how some of them were framed. For instance, a question on whether the tourism planning system in Oman was good or bad was noted as unclear and was rephrased as ‘how well does the tourism planning system in Oman work’? Another question, ‘does the system make it possible to participate’? was revised as ‘does the system allow for stakeholder participation’? Another question ‘why do you want to participate in tourism planning’? was rephrased to ‘why do people want to participate in tourism planning’?

The pre-testing was carried out through face-to-face interviews with 20 participants in Oman who were either directly related to tourism or were living in a tourism destination within Oman. They included members of local communities, government employees and tourism businesses. All 20 interviews were recorded, and the responses were reviewed with the aim of enhancing clarity, relevance, and suitability of the questions for the target population. Interviewees were also asked if they felt any further questions should be included. One interviewee, suggested including a question on the actual experience of interviewees in stakeholder participation and whether their perspectives were considered by decision makers. All relevant input from the interviews during the pre-test was carefully considered and incorporated to enhance the effectiveness of the interview questions.

3.7.3 Key Informant (KI) Interviews

In depth semi-structured interviews were used in the first phase of primary data collection to gather qualitative data that relates to all three research objectives in this study. Thus, the KI interviews were designed to supplement the document analysis by gaining further

understanding of the challenges and weaknesses in the current tourism planning process (research objective one). Furthermore, the interviews elicited the understanding, experiences, and perspectives of tourism stakeholders in relation to stakeholder participation in the planning process (objective two). The understanding thus gained in relation to research objective one and two provided a large part of the input to develop an integrated framework for tourism planning and stakeholder participation which is the focus of the third research objective.

To understand stakeholder perspectives, it is important for the researcher to search for the meaning of a participant's experience (Kvale,1996). In seeking to understand meaning, the use of interviews is helpful as they allow for deeper understanding of participants' experiences and enable the researcher to look for further relevant information about the issues studied (McNamara,1999). According to Al Hosni (2017) when collecting data from different stakeholders with diverse backgrounds and experiences, the best method is interviews, as each person can explain their unique perspective.

The use of semi-structured interviews rather than either structured or open interviews was considered ideal for this study. Structured or closed interviews do not give the researcher the freedom of asking follow-up questions, while open interviews can take a long time and responses can move away from the focus of the research. In comparison, semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer the freedom to seek further elaboration and to ask more questions based on responses (Cohen et al. 2011; Kvale, 1996) and at the same time, gives more structure to ensure focus on the issues studied and thereby saves time (Al-Hosni, 2017). These objectives cannot be achieved when using closed or open interviews.

The pretested interview guide was divided into four sections each with a set of questions to guide the researcher in framing the question. The first section focused on questions related to the current tourism planning system in Oman to understand participant perspectives on its effectiveness and weaknesses. The interviews began with an open question about the participants' understanding of tourism planning. This question allowed the interviewee to express what they thought openly as well as enabling the interviewer to build on the interviewee's understanding. They were questioned about the efficiency of the current tourism planning system and the challenges which is linked to the first research objective.

The second section focused on follow up questions on several issues in tourism planning as revealed by the document analysis. This was intended to shed light on when and how such issues arose and whether they could have been addressed in the planning stage. A third set of questions explored stakeholders' perspectives and experience in participation within the current system. This was designed to gain understanding of how stakeholder participation in tourism planning was currently implemented and how participants viewed this process and is linked to the second research objective. Participants were then asked how they would like to see stakeholder participation evolve and implemented within Oman's tourism planning system. While these were the three main broad areas, there was flexibility in that the researcher could ask other questions where appropriate. For example, when asking participants about their experience of stakeholder participation, it was assumed that the MoT is involved in the planning process. Therefore, MoT participants were not questioned as to whether they participated in the tourism planning process, but whether the MoT had involved other stakeholders, whereas for community members the question was whether they had been involved in planning activities by the MoT. The final section included a few questions about the participants' personal profiles. The interview questions were first prepared in English and then translated into Arabic as it is the first language of most of the participants. These translated questions were given to a professional translator to verify the accuracy of the translations.

Stakeholder Category	Location	
	Muscat	Dhofar
Tourism Businesses: Private sector	7	3
Tourism Businesses: SME/Entrepreneurs	1	4
Tourism Businesses: Semi Government Company	2	0
Tourism Businesses: Government Investor	1*	
Local Community: Residents and Municipal Council Members	2	2
Academia	5	2
NGO	1	0
Media	2*	
Government	8	5
<i>*Operates in both Muscat and Dhofar with headquarters in Muscat</i>		

Table 6: Participant Sample Size for Key Informant Interviews

Table 6 provides the breakdown of the KI interviews by location. Potential participants were contacted either by phone, or by visiting their offices, or by email. Those who agreed to be interviewed were later contacted again to agree to a date, time, and venue that was appropriate for them. The researcher recorded the interviews using a mobile recording application and also took notes during the interviews. Some of the recorded interviews were transcribed on the same day of the interview while others were transcribed later.

The majority of interviews were either carried out at participants' offices or sometimes, if requested, at participants' homes or in the quieter, less crowded cafes. Normally, the researcher and the participants would have an ice-breaking chat before moving to the interview questions. This chat was informal and therefore was not recorded. Interviews normally lasted between 60 to 75 minutes, though a few were less than an hour depending on the available time an interviewee had, the responses provided, and the issues raised by the interviewee. Some of the responses were straightforward and needed less time to digest, whilst others had to be explored further to ensure clarity. For example, a respondent when

asked whether the MoT involved him or his organisation in planning, may have answered, 'yes they did'. Therefore, further clarification was needed about how and the extent to which he or his organisation was involved.

At the end of the first stage of KI interviews, the interview data were analysed using critical discourse analysis. Based on the findings, and the literature on stakeholder participation, two illustrations reflecting stakeholder participation in the tourism planning process were developed. These two illustrations were used to gather further feedback from stakeholders in the second phase of data collection.

3.7.4 Focus Group Discussions

In the second phase of primary data collection, feedback was collected through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). This phase of data collection was intended to provide input and feedback for the third research objective, i.e., to develop a framework for tourism planning and stakeholder participation that addresses identified weakness and challenges. In this stage, the researcher presented the FGD participants with two illustrations of stakeholder participation in tourism planning. Illustration or Process I reflected the current tourism planning process and stakeholder participation process in Oman as revealed by the document analysis and the KI interviews. Illustration or Process II integrated stakeholder views on how the tourism planning process in Oman can be strengthened as revealed by the KI interviews along with some elements from the literature on tourism planning.

The FGDs were aimed at gathering stakeholder perspectives on the strengths and weaknesses of the two processes that were developed by the researcher based on the literature, the document analysis and results of the KI interviews. The feedback thus generated enabled the researcher to develop a detailed and appropriate framework for tourism planning in Oman that reflected the realities and addressed the weaknesses. According to Stewart, (2015, p. 39), focus groups are helpful in identifying issues with a proposed "programme, service or product". He notes that a focus group is useful to test a new design, in terms of whether to go with it or not and if not, why not, and what other options are available (Stewart, 2015, p. 103). Furthermore focus groups provide the chance for participants to debate each other's responses (Robson, 2011). Hence, focus group discussions (FGDs) were considered the most appropriate method for getting feedback on the perceived effectiveness of the two processes that were presented to them.

The FGDs provided a good environment for different views to be discussed and challenged by the participants of each stakeholder group. Any strengths or weaknesses that were raised by one participant could be contradicted or further developed by other participants. This allowed the researcher to see how different perspectives of participants shaped up when they were put together. Also, as each focus group included only members from one stakeholder group, this homogeneity in the membership made it possible for respondents to raise their concerns about the proposed processes more freely, since they were not worried about judgements from other groups of stakeholders (Tuulentie and Mettiäinen, 2007). This gave the researcher a further opportunity to validate what had been developed and to ensure that the final framework included views of all relevant stakeholders at all levels of planning and implementation (Maiden, 2008, p. i).

Stakeholder Category	Number of Participants	Number of Focus Groups
Tourism Business: Private Sector	4	1
Tourism Business: SME/ Entrepreneurs	4	1
Local Community	8	2
Academia	4	1
Media	4	1
Government: Individual Interviews	5	0

Table 7: Stage 2: Participant Sample Size for Focus Group Discussions

The FGDs took place in Oman in the summer of 2018. All potential FGD participants were contacted by phone and through office visits. Six FGD groups were convened, while a seventh potential focus group with six government officials who could not all meet at the same time was replaced by five separate one-to-one interviews. FGDs were organised with tourism business organisations, freelance tour guides, local community, media and academia (see Table 6 for the number of FGDs participants and groups). As there was only one representative from environmental NGOs it was not possible to have a focus group with NGOs. The FGDs were organised to take place at convenient locations for participants. The two-local community FGDs were arranged in premises at their villages, e.g., the Al Kuwadh local community FGD was conducted in one of the participants' houses, and the Bowsher

local community FGD was conducted in a convenient café in their village. The tour guides and the media FGDs were conducted in cafés, the tourism business organisations FGD in a hotel and the academic group FGD in one of the colleges.

All the FGDs and the replacement interviews were recorded using a mobile application recorder and were transcribed later. The interviewer also took note of comments, he thought that were worth recalling at the time. During the focus group discussions, participants were presented with the two illustrations reflecting two different processes of stakeholder participation in tourism planning. The two processes presented were Process I, which reflected the current tourism planning process in Oman; and Process II, which reflected the KI interview participants' perspectives on stakeholder participation. Participants were provided with diagrammatic representations of the two processes as it was felt this would be more effective in enabling the participants to understand the processes easily. The researcher briefly explained the two illustrations at the outset without revealing which process was which. The FG participants were then asked to provide their opinions on the two processes. This helped to verify the extent to which Process I represented the current system of planning and stakeholder participation and the extent to which Process II was representative of stakeholder views. It also allowed participants more freedom to be open with any criticism of the processes. Some of the participants directly made changes to the paper copies and handed them to the researcher at the end of the FGDs and interviews.

Based on the participant feedback generated through the FGDs, KI interviews as well as the literature review, an integrated framework of tourism planning that included an appropriate level of stakeholder participation and addressed the current weaknesses in planning and implementation was developed.

3.7.5 Problems Encountered in Field Work

The data collection was challenging in many ways. One of the most difficult tasks was organising the focus groups so that all participants could attend at the same time and place. One focus group meeting was arranged for government officials from organisations in Muscat. The obvious way to commence contact with this group was through a Director at the MoT, as these target employees and officials were all part of a committee that regularly meets at the MoT and all meetings are arranged by the MoT. The Director of MoT who was contacted by phone, excused himself as he was going on leave and asked the researcher to

contact members of the committee individually, without providing their contact details. The members were finally contacted, and it was agreed with them for their own convenience, that the focus group discussion would take place on the same day as their committee meeting at the MoT. However, none of the members showed up for the FGD, even though they had all confirmed their intention to attend. When the researcher followed up with the secretary of the committee, he was informed that the members had excused themselves at the last-minute through text messages indicating that other commitments had come up. The secretary also commented that these individuals were not reliable with their regular meetings or time keeping. A similar incident also occurred with the second government FGD with government officials in the Dhofar Governorate. Although, arrangements had been made through a senior government official, once again, no one showed up for the FGD except the person who helped coordinate the meeting.

A third government focus group was arranged with a senior government committee with membership from different ministries. All members were informed about the FGD and that it was going to last for approximately one hour. On the day of the FGD and just five minutes before the scheduled time, the chairman of the committee was called away by the Minister for a very important and unplanned meeting. The chairman delegated the responsibility to his assistant to continue with the FGD as agreed with the members. Once the FGD started, the two Processes were explained to the group, and one participant shared his views on the frameworks with the group. However, as soon as he stopped speaking, the assistant to the committee chair stated, “we are sorry, but we cannot continue this focus group as we are very busy. Those who are interested in giving their opinions can contact the researcher later, on an individual basis by email or phone”. When the researcher reminded him that the chairman and committee members had agreed to a FGD and not to one-to-one feedback by mail or phone, he still insisted that the meeting was at a close. The assistant was not a member of the committee and had not even been invited to the focus group. Although he was only there to attend the meeting in place of the chairman, he ended the discussion abruptly.

These difficulties with conducting FGDs with government representatives and the short time remaining for the field study, led the researcher to conclude that further attempts to arrange FGDs with government members would fail, and instead, in lieu of FGDs, individual interviews with government officials from the government organisations that had a stake in tourism were arranged and successfully conducted. The experience provided the researcher

with a valuable lesson on government employees' culture of timekeeping and cooperation with researchers. These are side findings that have not been included in the research findings, but future researchers might bear them in mind while planning FGDs or other collective activities with government representatives in Oman. In contrast, the other stakeholder groups were very committed to the FGDs and were willingly to spend extra time for these sessions.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Cohen (2018) emphasises that researchers sometimes uncover information that is related to the personal experiences of people, and they have moral responsibilities towards their respondents to respect their confidentiality. All participants in this study were assured that their identity would be protected, when they were first contacted and invited to attend the interviews. They were also informed that they were free to refuse to participate in the interviews or FGD without any obligation. This included the right to withdraw from the interview or FGDs at any time or to refuse to answer any question. They were also informed that their names or any possible identifiers would not appear anywhere in the thesis. They were sent a letter to confirm this anonymity along with information about the interview process and the ethical approval of Newcastle University's ethics committee including the names and email addresses of the thesis supervisors, and they were given a consent form to complete. The participants were duly informed that the interview and FGD would be recorded, and the data would be used solely for the purposes of this study and nothing else, but that they could freely refuse to be recorded. They were encouraged to suggest a time and they were told they could cancel the interview or could withdraw from the interview at any time without any consequences for them. They were also asked if they wanted to see the transcriptions before any data were used in the study (See appendices B and C). There were no issues with power relationships in this study because no participant had any power over anyone else, nor were there any conflicts either with the researcher or with each other. Accordingly, respondents spoke freely and without inhibition. Although the researcher is an insider in the tourism sector and has been working in the tourism sector for several years, he took care to maintain a neutral position throughout the process of data collection and analysis.

3.9 Critical Discourse Analysis

People use language to describe their opinions and this study seeks to understand the perspectives of tourism stakeholders on tourism planning and stakeholder participation as

expressed in the words they used in KI interviews and FGDs. It seeks to not merely examine how different stakeholders describe things but to explore how their discourse offers further insights into their perspectives and interpretations of reality. According to Van Dijk (1985), language is a social and cultural product that is composed of different views on reality. He argues that it is necessary for researchers to look for insights into these realities and how they lead to the creation of knowledge which informs decision-making by organisations and people. Discourse analysis is rooted in the constructivist paradigm (Fulcher, 2010) and discourse can be defined as “ideas, concepts, and categories in which meaning is given to a phenomenon” (Hajer, 2002, p.63). From this perspective, discourse is people’s input into a discussion rather than the discussion itself and necessitates understanding how and why people contribute to a discourse in a particular way. According to Van Dijk (2001) any discourse including scientific and scholarly discourse is never value-free as it is influenced by social structure and social interactions. Hannam and Knox (2005), argues that a discourse reflects assumptions held not only by those who express it, but invariably also by the wider society where it may be institutionalised as a social norm – i.e., what is regarded as right or wrong in a society.

There are different perspectives on discourse analysis, which present different levels of language use, ranging from the simple use of language to describe and communicate ideas to a more complex level that include interpretations of reality and norms (Carver, 2002). There are several ways in which CDA can be conducted (Van Dijk 2001; Hammersley, 2002). For example, the discourse analyst may focus not only on sentences and words, but on the flow of an entire text (Hammersley, 2002). This requires considerable reflection by the researcher to discover the underlying meaning of a text, and to explain how that explanation was arrived at (Hannam and Knox, 2005). Some discourse analysts are interested in the style of a person’s discourse as a literary or rhetorical exercise; they make note of the kind of metaphors, similes, or allusions that are used by the speaker as well as the literary and rhetorical devices the speaker does not use. Fairclough (1992) calls this the first or ‘textual’ step, which examines the language structure including grammar, sentences, and words.

Other discourse analysts dissect a speaker’s discourse to understand the basic foundations of the proposition the speaker is seeking to convey. Sometimes people use arguments in their utterances, and this requires finding out how people are positioned in an argument (Hajer, 2002). Gee (2014) observes that some discourse analysts focus on putting the discourse in

context, whether in intellectual context (in relation to what is in the literature); or biographical context (in relation to what the speaker usually says); or social context (in relation to what other people say); or historical context (in relation to what has been said in the past). Fairclough (1992) calls this the second or 'discursive' step, looking especially at what is generated for the society, linking the discursive text to the larger social context. He asserts that discourse analysis builds on the fact that the text is not separated from its context and so it is necessary to examine who said what, when it was said, and what purpose it served. Similarly, Hammersley (2002) emphasises that we cannot rely on what is mentioned in the text itself independent of the social context.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a deeper level of analysis which builds on discourse analysis but seeks to get beyond the literary or contextual stage to investigate the meanings of the words to understand the broader motivation and purpose of the person using the language. For example, CDA is concerned about understanding how power is used and authorised in society (Van Dijk, 1985) which according to Tonkiss (2012) goes beyond discourse analysis to discover its societal and political dimensions and outcomes. Power entails control, because, powerful groups can control or influence the actions, knowledge, beliefs, and thinking of weaker groups. According to Blommaert (2005) and Mogashoa (2014), CDA as a research method has an interest in unveiling the power and knowledge structures that exist in a particular society, which can be found through the use of language. Hannam and Knox (2005) notes that the text may contain hidden or subtle meanings and carries beneath its outward appearance, various attributes of 'knowledge, power and relations' in society. They consider that the choice of words is key as language is the political currency that lubricates the power games being played out. Van Dijk (2006: p.259) writes that CDA enables us to see how dominant or marginalised a participant is from the way he/she is portrayed or referred to in a speech or text; by deconstructing the text, we come to understand the power differences that exists in a particular social system. CDA is intended to reveal the interests that often lie behind the discourse: critical discourse analysts do not take at face value what spokespersons say but interpret all speech as having a purpose, often designed to disguise the reason for its utterance. They home in particularly on narratives constructed by governments to deflect the blame for some policy failure on to other actors.

CDA is based on a constructionist epistemological view (Phillips and Hardy, 2002). It concentrates on how people present themselves in specific ways, focusing not only on how a

text is built and what is the ecosystem in which the text is embedded, but also what it tells us of the power relations within that ecosystem, and how proposals are formed, and ideas are challenged and defended (Cassell and Symon, 2004). Fairclough (1992) calls this the third or ‘control’ step, which involves examining what the text tells readers about whom has the upper hand in forming the social discourse, and how agreements are achieved (Blommaert, 2005. p.27) in societies. CDA as a method of analysis is particularly designed to reveal power difference and inequalities. Van Dijk (1993, p.255) notes that power and dominance are usually institutionalised and organised especially in the contexts of planning and decision making where a few members or groups, referred to as the ‘power elites’ dominate. The existence of a controlling discourse can be identified through the recurrence in a text of a view expressed by many people or by the same person in different texts or showing its “dominance in a context” (Cassell and Symon, 2004, p.8). Therefore, whenever a particular discourse is mentioned it must be noted and checked to see how it is reproduced each time (Cassell and Symon, 2004). For example, “hedging a question” is when a discourse can be present in a non-direct response to a question, when the interviewee expects the interviewer to judge him and therefore, presents his answer in a particular way that he considers portrays himself favourably (Cassell and Symon, 2004, p. 15).

3.10 Application of CDA in this Study

To understand the power structures, motivations, and contexts that underlie stakeholder perspectives of tourism planning and stakeholder participation, the planning documents, and primary data from KI interviews and FGDs were analysed using CDA. Examination of the power differences, motivations and knowledge structures of tourism stakeholders are key to achieving the objectives of this study as they offer deeper insights into the challenges and efficacy of the government’s system of tourism planning and the role of stakeholder theory within this system. Moreover, within a non-democratic system of governance as exists in Oman, power and knowledge structures can have significant influence on all stakeholders, the extent of their participation and, therefore, on tourism planning and decision-making.

Applying CDA to a study on planning and stakeholder participation requires the researcher to go beyond the participants’ statements to identify who the power elites are and who are marginalised, as well as to understand participants’ motives in making those statements, and how far they are representative of the opinions of other participants (Fairclough, 1992). Understanding power dominance perspectives as noted by Van Dijk (2006) and Hammersley

(2002) also requires the researcher to examine the tourism discourse in Oman in terms of how much autonomy stakeholders have, and how stakeholder cognitions are shaped by the more dominant stakeholders. Linking texts to the ideological, social, economic and political contexts and power structures will help the researcher to better understand what was said by the different stakeholders, why they said it, and how it reflects on tourism planning efforts and stakeholder participation.

Moreover, according to Gee and Handford (2013, p.9) CDA can be a 'normative and explanatory critique' to tell us not only what views exist in a society, but also to evaluate them. Applying the normative characteristic of CDA to this study entails examining stakeholder discourse in terms of political, economic, and social contexts to assess how valuable stakeholders' views can be for the development of the tourism sector in Oman. The longer-term development of the tourism sector requires balancing the political, socio-cultural, and economic interests of all stakeholders and CDA will help in understanding how this can be done. As emphasised by Morgan (2010), CDA is context specific and thus offers relevant practical judgements at a given time or for a given place in order to make appropriate decisions or to offer recommendations.

CDA was first applied in this thesis to the document analysis of Oman Vision 2020 and OTS 2040. The analysis of each document was conducted on three levels, following Alsamdani (2017). First, different topics presented in the documents were identified. Second, the texts were examined in terms of the discursive strategies employed. Third, the texts were scrutinised to understand how they referred to events and processes and revealed power structures among the different stakeholders - for example, by examining differences in the way they refer to different stakeholders and what attributes are given to them. Also, CDA helped identify the stakeholders whose influence on planning was either clearly marked in the document or was detected beneath the surface of the text. Furthermore, stakeholders who were either not included or not mentioned were identified. Analysis of the two documents also examined how far they met the requirements of evidence-based policy requirements. This included how evidence was collected from stakeholders to support OTS 2040 and how stakeholders were involved for the purpose of collecting evidence. The discourse was also examined for contradictions and how arguments were presented in the text including references to challenges and how solutions were presented to overcome such challenges.

All discourses from the KI interviews and FGDs were scrutinised to reveal power differences and how participants expressed themselves in particular ways. This was done at different levels as recommended by Wodak and Meyer (2009). First the profiles of the participants were examined. Second, discourse topics or themes were identified, and the data was organised under these topics. Third, sub-discourses under the main topics were identified and data were organised accordingly. Fourth, the discourse was examined at the sentence level from a language perspective (e. g., what is being said) as well as from a socio-cultural, political, or ideological perspective (i.e., why is it said in this way?). In order to understand how participants regarded the concept of stakeholder participation in Oman, their discourse was examined to determine (1) whose views dominate the tourism discursive field and why? (2) what are the barriers that appear in the respondents' language that may hinder participation or decision making? (3) do actors appear to be equal within the context of participation? Other relevant questions especially from the power dominance perspective that were examined include: (4) does the consultative process in Oman allow for stakeholders to speak for themselves? and (5) are stakeholder cognitions shaped by the more dominant stakeholders? In other words, are stakeholders' views in Oman influenced by what is perceived as acceptable to the more dominant stakeholders, or do they reflect their own views?

3.10.1 Transcription and Coding

All interviews and FGDs were recorded and later transcribed in Arabic and the transcriptions were then translated to English. The recording was very helpful for listening to the conversations again to improve the accuracy of transcripts (Silverman, 2011). Additional notes were also taken by the researcher on important issues to help with the transcription and data analysis later. The transcriptions of the KI interviews began early during the first phase of data collection and all interview transcriptions were completed within a few weeks.

The KI interviews and participants were coded using a number to represent each participant. Participants from Muscat were given the code KI-M followed by a unique number, while respondents from Dhofar were given the code KI-D followed by a unique number to hide the identities of participants. For the FGDs in the second phase, each focus group was given a number and each participant in that group was also given a unique number. For example, FGD1-1 denotes that this is participant number one from focus group number one. Those participants who could not attend the FGD and were interviewed in the second stage were

given the code KI2 followed by a unique number to differentiate between the first set of interviews. For example, K12-1 denotes the first interviewee in the second stage of data collection.

For all participants, a further code was included in brackets which referred to their stakeholder category as follows:

- (GO): Government stakeholder
- (SGC): Semi-government tourism business
- (PVS): Private sector tourism business including SMEs and entrepreneurs
- (TA): Tourism academic
- (PFI): Pension fund investor
- (MS): Media
- (LCM): Leader of local community
- (MCM): Elected Municipal Council Member
- (NGO): Non-Governmental Organisation

3.10.2 Discourse Strands or Theme Generation

The data from the interviews and FGDs was organised into themes to conduct CDA. According to Wodak and Meyer (2009) to carry out CDA, the text must be examined as a whole to identify strands and sub-strands in the discourse. They define discourse strands as “flows of discourse that centre on a common topic at the level of concrete utterances” (p. 46). Categorising discourses into data strands or themes is an important first step in organising data for both critical discourse analysis (Lyon, 2013) and any other form of qualitative analysis (Braun and Clark, 2006; Terry et al. 2017). Hannam and Knox (2005) note that in CDA the objectives of a particular study will influence the choice of themes. They stress that the coding frame must be exhaustive such that all data is categorised under the themes.

Categorisation of the data collected in this study into discourse strands was done with the help of NVivo, which has been used in innumerable research studies for analysing qualitative data (Robson, 2011) including the use of critical discourse analysis (Lyon, 2013). The

researcher gave considerable attention to ensure the accuracy of the verbatim transcription of interview and FGD data and their subsequent translation to English. To do this, the researcher familiarised himself with the data by listening closely and repeatedly to the audio records and reading the transcripts. All transcripts and the translations were therefore reviewed several times. The transcripts were then imported to NVivo. All data that were relevant to a particular topic or question irrespective of where they appeared in the transcript were identified and grouped together. So, all stakeholder input on a common theme or topic, whether they were concurring or opposing views, were grouped together. Participant responses, for example, anecdotes or experiences which did not contain direct references or vocabulary relating to a topic or theme but did provide descriptions of issues under that theme, were also included. Themes were also created for issues raised by participants that were valuable in addressing the research objectives but were not directly related to any of the questions. For example, although there were no direct questions asked about OTS 2040 or the power of different stakeholders, some participants referred to these in their responses and those responses were grouped under themes in the first round.

Such grouping or organising of data can be done using NVivo so that a node is created and all similar things that were said about a particular topic are added to that particular node (Robson, 2011). For example, using NVivo a node was created for ‘important tourism stakeholders’, and everything that participants said about who should participate in tourism planning in Oman was grouped together from all the transcripts. Similarly, another node was created for ‘stakeholder participation experience’ and all stakeholder participation experience was grouped together under that node, and so on. This was done for all the data and several nodes were created. After this process, a print-out of the topics or nodes were obtained and laboriously examined to verify that the content did refer to those themes or nodes and were not about other issues. This required constantly referring to the transcripts, the questions asked, as well as the notes taken by the researcher. Finally, the coding was judged accurate enough at the stage when, there were 22 main topics and 43 sub-topics. Appendix D presents the discourse strands that appeared in the text from based on the initial rounds of examination.

After further examination, commonalties among the different discourse strands were then identified. However, it was found that many of these themes could be amalgamated to form fewer overarching themes, and eventually they were boiled down to nine main themes (See appendix E for final discourse strands/themes). According to Jaspal (2020. p.302) content

analysis, thematic analysis and discourse analysis share similar stages in developing themes and the researcher can find commonality between codes and decide to merge them into 'overarching strands or themes.' For example, when stakeholders were talking about careers and jobs, economic returns, and Oman natural attractions, they were essentially referring to the benefits of tourism, and so they were merged under a main strand or theme called 'Benefits of Tourism.' Similarly, discourse strands on projects, sites, licencing, implementation, decision-making, government officials' performance & accountability, and OTS 2040 were mostly referring to participants' perceptions of the current tourism planning system in Oman. And hence all these strands were merged under the overarching strand 'Current Tourism Planning System' with sub-strands. Similarly, the initial strands 'coastal and marine tourism' and 'environment', were merged under the wider stand 'Risks of Tourism' and the sub-strand 'Environmental Concerns.' The final nine strands were: Benefits of Tourism, Risks of Tourism, Current Tourism Planning in Oman, Current Stakeholder Participation in Tourism Planning, Stakeholder Participation in OTS 2040, Extent of Stakeholder Participation, Stakeholder Motives for Participation, Key Stakeholders in Tourism Planning and Stakeholder Consultation and Stakeholder Decision-making. These final nine strands and sub-strands are presented in Appendix D.

The same process was followed for the FGDs and the responses of all participants from all groups to each question were grouped according to the nature of the response. For example, on the question 'what do you think about Process I?', if participants provided a negative response about the Process, these negative views were grouped into a node which then became a theme (See appendix F for full theme generation list). Considering the number of interviews and the large amount of original material obtained from the KI interviews and FGDs, this merging of data under fewer themes helped to avoid creating many themes that would have blunted the critical analysis of the data under each theme.

For the document analysis, NVivo software was helpful in identifying key words and topics. For example, a search query was opened to look at each single stakeholder category or name in order to determine how often the name of each stakeholder appeared and what kind of information or discourse it was associated with, e.g., what qualities were given to each individual stakeholder group. Other search queries included keywords such as 'participation', 'collaboration', 'engagement' to explore how the documents used these terms.

3.10.3 Techniques Used for Critical Discourse Analysis

The rationale for using CDA as the main method of data analysis has been set out in the previous section. In conducting the CDA the following steps were taken in relation to the KI interview and FGD data after they had been grouped under common themes:

1. **Stakeholder Profiles:** The profiles of participants, their stakeholder category and their background are key to the critical analysis of their discourse. The category to which participants belong and their backgrounds will affect their knowledge, motives and perspectives. Hence an initial step in critically analysing the discourse data was to write profiles of all the participants. This included the type of stakeholder category they belong to, their organisational role, and their cultural or ethnic background as these are some of the factors that influence a person's view of the world (Alsamdani, 2017). All participants were given codes and the identifying codes used for each stakeholder category is presented in section 3.9.1 in this chapter are key and is referred to throughout the chapters that analyse the interview and FGD discourse.
2. **Critical Discourse Analysis Techniques:** As discussed in section 3.6.4. discourse analysts use various techniques in their analysis, which Gee (2011) refers to as tools. McGregor (2010) and Gillen and Peterson (2005) argue that CDA does not have a unitary or specific framework or methodology as it encompasses a range of methods or techniques in order to arrive at a coherent whole. The use of different techniques or tools will depend on the discourse itself or what the objectives may be (Hammersley, 2002). Techniques or tools for CDA include lexical analysis, intertextuality, semantics, topicalisation, connotation; modality and identity or ideology construction through use of pronouns such as I or we (Gee, 2011; Lyon, 2013, Mogashoa, 2014). In this study particular attention was given to modality, intertextuality, topicalisation, nomination, predication, contextualisation, connotation, implication, and reflection to analyse the discourse in terms of power and information structures, and social, political, economic, and ideological contexts.
3. **Modality:** Modality refers to the use of specific words intended to convey a degree of urgency, certainty or authority (Mogashoa, 2014) and can be used to study the attitudes of participants (Ademilokun, 2019). By examining the use of modal words such as 'should, could, and must' which indicate a call to action in the discourse of the different

stakeholders, their attitudes and response to the social, political and other realities surrounding tourism planning and stakeholder participation can be understood. The researcher examined how the different participants/stakeholders used modal words to communicate their attitudes and views regarding the topics under discussion.

4. **Intertextuality:** Intertextuality refers to the interconnectedness of any text to prior or subsequent ones i.e., prior utterances or statements will shape present ones as well as anticipating future ones (Allen, 2011). Therefore, texts should be read in the context and against the background of other texts (Lemke 1995). Hannam and Knox (2005) argues that discourse analysts should first recognise that all texts have a relation to other texts (i.e., intertextually) and are embedded within power relations and degrees of authority. This requires the actual meaning to be considered against the background of other utterances on the same theme including contradictory opinions and viewpoints (Allen, 2011) i.e., the wider systems of knowledge which are constantly evolving.
5. **Topicalisation:** Topicalisation refers to how the speaker or author frames the sentence by their choice of what to put in the topic position (McGregor, 2010), i.e., what perspective or slant are they putting on what they are saying? As noted by Lyon (2013), topicalisation also includes what is not being stated or is being omitted in the discourse.
6. **Nomination:** Nomination, refers to the use of pronouns in constructing identity or supporting an ideology, is often found in discourse and reveals how people regard themselves and others (Locke, 2004; McGregor, 2010). In examining stakeholder discourse, this is useful in understanding which groups they consider themselves as part of and whom they believe the ‘others’ are.
7. **Predication:** Predication refers to the use of qualifying words to groups or individuals, objects, or phenomena. One way in which predicative strategies are used in discourse is to attribute negative or positive qualifiers, such as adjectives, making comparative statements or evaluations and using similes and metaphors. Examining these in stakeholder discourse allows us to understand what value judgments and attributes participants have arrived at.
8. **Contextualisation:** Contextualisation refers to words which reveal where respondents see themselves in their community. For example, according to Locke (2004), reiteration can signal authority or power structure within the discourse. Repeated reiterations were

examined to determine whether they signalled strong attitudes of authority held by stakeholder groups. Also, contextualisation can indicate the intention of a respondent or author, which may lie behind the words used. Moreover, to articulate how discourse is linked to the larger societal power structures and systems, Lawless and Chen's (2019) suggest using three criteria for analysing discourse namely recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness that was developed by Owens (1984). According to Owen (1984) recurrence occurs when meaning is repeated in a discourse but does not necessarily use the same words while repetition is the specific reappearance of key words or phrases (as cited in Lawless and Chen, 2019). The third criteria, forcefulness, is the relative significance that participants assign to their language through their tone, volume, and inflection. Lawless and Chen's (2019) suggests seeking further insights from the discourse on the individual and shared experiences of participants within the economic, social, historical, ideological, and political contexts and structures.

9. **Connotations:** Connotation refers to the use of words which convey strong meaning or emphasis. In written discourse, this can be seen in the use of headings and keywords to emphasise certain concepts or ideas (McGregor, 2010). This was found both in the document analysis and interview and FGD analysis.
10. **Implication:** Implication refers to implicit information which can be deduced or inferred from discourse by knowledge of socio-cultural, economic, ideological, and political circumstances.
11. **Reflection:** Reflection refers to the researcher or analyst incorporating a reflective stance wherein they cannot be neutral observers. In applying the above techniques to stakeholder discourse in Oman, the researcher's familiarity and understanding of the language, social and political systems, and the tourism sector, allowed for a more critical interpretation of the discourse.

According to Wood and Kroger (2000), in qualitative research, analysis of data must be carried out until there are no new categories identified, thus reaching saturation point. In this study, the researcher examined the discourse under each theme, first in terms of different points raised, which were coded to easily track similarities and differences. Second, each comment was examined using the CDA techniques indicated above until no new ideas or meanings emerged. Table 8 below sets out this method of data analysis. As noted by

Alsamdani (2017), this does not mean that all linguistic relevance of the sample will have been exhausted but rather that the discursive analysis has been sufficient to substantiate the interpretation or argument being put forward.

	Data Analysis Method and Techniques	Critical Analysis Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OTS (2040) • Oman Vision (2020) 	<p>Method: Critical Discourse Analysis</p> <p>Techniques:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nomination • Predication • Intertextuality • Topicalisation • Implication • Reflection 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 How are policies and plans developed? 2 Who dominates the discourse and how does this affect the planning process and outcomes? 3 Who are considered the primary tourism stakeholders in Oman and do they appear to be equal in terms of influence? 4 What is the extent of participation of the tourism stakeholders and how are decisions made? 5 Are there any contradictions/barriers in language? 6 What is being normalised?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key Informant Semi-Structured Interviews 	<p>Method: Critical Discourse Analysis</p> <p>Techniques:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modality • Nomination • Predication • Intertextuality • Topicalisation • Contextualisation • Connotations • Implication • Reflection 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 What are stakeholders emphasising individually or collectively regarding tourism development and the planning process and why? 2 Are there more dominant or pervasive views and why? 3 How is stakeholder awareness and perspectives influenced by more dominant stakeholders, or the social, cultural, political, economic, or practical contexts? 4 Whom do participants consider to be the important tourism stakeholders and what are their motives in participating? 5 Do participants really think their perspectives should be, and will be, considered in decision making? 6 How comfortable or conflicted are participants with the concept of stakeholder participation?

		<p>7 Are there barriers in stakeholder discourse that may hinder participation?</p> <p>8 Can the consultative process in Oman allow stakeholders to speak for themselves?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FGDs 	<p>Method: Critical Discourse Analysis</p> <p>Techniques:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modality • Nomination • Predication • Intertextuality • Topicalisation • Contextualisation signals • Connotations • Implication • Reflection 	<p>1 What are stakeholders emphasising individually or collectively regarding the two planning processes and why?</p> <p>2 How are stakeholders' views of the two processes influenced by social, cultural, political, economic or practical contexts?</p> <p>3 How comfortable or conflicted are participants with the concept of stakeholder participation?</p> <p>4 How important do they really think stakeholder participation is to the tourism planning process in Oman?</p> <p>5 Do they think that either or both the two processes can strengthen tourism outcomes? If so, in what way?</p>

Table 8: Data Analysis Methods and Techniques

3.11 Issues of Validity and Reliability

Some of the central issues in research are questions regarding the validity and reliability of the findings. Validity requires research to reflect the true meaning of the issues or concepts under investigation (Saunders et al. 2007) and is focused on whether the data collection and analysis reflects an accurate picture of the issues being studied (Bernard, 2013). While triangulation of results is often used to enhance research validity, Richardson (1994) and Maree and van de Westhuizen, (2009), argue that crystallisation is a better approach for validating qualitative research as it involves the validation of results by using multiple research methods of data collection and analysis. While triangulation entails drawing on several different methods of obtaining data (such as interviews, focus groups, survey questionnaires, documentary analysis), crystallisation entails in addition a much wider range of data gathering, including ethnography, poems, films, painting, music and performance art. In this study, multiple sources of data collection were employed including planning

documents, key informant interviews and focus groups discussions with several stakeholder groups, as well as the use of both primary and secondary methods. However, wider forms of data collection were not used, so triangulation not crystallisation was the technique adopted.

Validity of the research study can be a problem particularly, if there are differences in culture between the researcher and what is being researched (Kvale, 1983). In this study and as the researcher belongs to the same culture and country in which the research is conducted this issue does not arise. Whittemore et al. (2001) notes that establishing validity standards in qualitative research can be challenging as it deals with fluid and emergent ideas and must incorporate rigor as well as creativity and subjectivity. Hence, they synthesise a list of multiple techniques for establishing validity for qualitative studies (p. 533). Among such techniques, this study has employed the following: sampling adequacy, articulating data collection decisions, demonstrating prolonged engagement with data, demonstrating persistent observation, providing verbatim transcription, articulating data analysis decisions, using computer programs, exploring rival explanations, performing a literature review, providing evidence that support interpretations, acknowledging the researcher perspective and providing thick descriptions.

Reliability is about the capacity of future research to produce the same or similar outcomes (Silverman, 2011). For qualitative data collection the requirement of reliability may be attained in different ways (Silverman, 2011, p. 365). One way is the inclusion of multiple sources of data collection- i.e., triangulation. Other ways include being totally transparent in explaining how the research was carried out and including a pre-testing phase to identify the crucial issues to be researched rather than have the researcher setting down in advance what the main issues are. Both of these techniques were applied in this study. Further, questions for the KI interviews and FGDs were very carefully selected to avoid researcher bias or to ask leading questions. An additional element was the standardisation of the processes of interviewing and organising FGDs (for example, repeating almost similar questions, whenever possible, to the different interviewees and the FG participants). Moreover, all interview recordings were faithfully transcribed in the written transcripts, verbatim, not paraphrasing or 'correcting' them. In addition, the data was objectively analysed, and material was not selected tendentiously to support any views held by the researcher. This was done by using NVivo software to analyse the interview and FGD data and by discussions with supervisors.

3.12 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the constructivist epistemology that underpins the qualitative design and methodology of this study. The collection and analysis of data was carried out in different stages. Following the review of relevant literature, a critical discourse analysis of Oman Vision 2020 and OTS 2040 was conducted. These informed the interview questions in the first phase of primary data collection, i.e., semi-structured face-to-face interviews with different tourism stakeholders. The interview questions were pre-tested with a sample of 20 participants who were interviewed, and their responses and feedback were analysed to inform improvements to the interview guide. Based on the findings from the main fieldwork of 45 key informant interviews, two illustrated processes of stakeholder participation were prepared and feedback from stakeholders was collected in the next phase of data collection through focus group discussions. The planning documents and stakeholders' interview and focus group discourse were analysed using critical discourse analysis techniques to gain critical insights into the power structures and the contexts influencing stakeholder perspectives on tourism planning systems in Oman and the application of the concept of stakeholder participation.

Chapter 4. Analysis of National Planning Documents

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the analysis of two government planning documents: Oman Vision 2020 and OTS 2040. Critical discourse analysis was used to analyse the two documents in line with the objectives of the study. Analysis of the relevant sections of the two documents are necessary to understand if and how stakeholder participation is implemented within the current tourism planning system in Oman. The analysis, therefore, focused on identifying the tourism stakeholders involved in the process of preparing the plans and determining the extent to which stakeholder participation was present including any power differentials among stakeholder groups as may be evidenced within the discourse in the two texts. It does not attempt to analyse the quality or content of the plans themselves as presented in either document, in terms of their appropriateness or effectiveness. The findings of the critical discourse analysis of Oman Vision 2020 are first presented and is followed by OTS 2040.

4.2 Oman Vision 2020: Overview

The Oman Vision 2020 document was prepared by the former Ministry of National Economy (MoNE) and is written in Arabic. The document presents four five-year national plans for Oman for the period 2000 – 2020, covering all economic and social sectors. Vision 2020 is therefore a national plan for the whole country and is not just a vision statement. This study focused on analysing the sections of the document that are relevant to the planning process and how discourse on stakeholder participation appears in the document. The introductory section in Oman Vision 2020 document is followed by several sections. The first of these explains the preparation of statistical information required for the planning process and a general census of all sectors including demographics (citizens and residents), homes, buildings, trade and business establishments, factories, industrial and agricultural establishments. Data on national income are also presented. The third section deals with the establishment of a National Information and Documentation Centre, tasked with collecting data from all censuses and surveys. There is also a section on national economic surveys conducted for the period 1970-1993 i.e., the period before the preparation of Oman 2020 vision. Oman Vision 2020 also presents a macroeconomic model for Oman which was prepared with

the support of the World Bank. A further section discusses the development of Oman Vision 2020 itself and explains how the plan was developed. This last section was the main focus of analysis in this study and its findings are analysed in the next section.

4.3 Stakeholders Identified in Oman Vision 2020

The Oman Vision 2020 document makes a broad range of references to several tourism stakeholders. The most clearly identifiable stakeholder is the government itself which is represented by different actors or agents including His Majesty the Sultan, the Ministerial Council (the Cabinet), the Ministry of Development, the Minister of Commerce and Industry and other relevant government organisations which are represented by their undersecretaries. Further government-related stakeholders are the A'shura members (members of parliament) who at the time were appointed by the Sultan himself rather than being elected by the public. Elected representatives included only the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, a government-funded organisation whose chair although elected by the private sector, is formally appointed to the role by royal decree. Non-governmental stakeholders referred to in the documents include independent experts from abroad and the World Bank.

The document differentiates between the different government stakeholders themselves and reveals the hierarchy of power and decision-making. One revealing discourse is the varying degree of emphasis placed on titles and designations throughout the document. While there is clear emphasis and attention placed on the titles and positions of some government stakeholders, others are more generalised. For instance, all references to governmental bodies such as the Ministerial Council, the Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs and Ministers are emphasised and identified individually, and the language used is clear in its emphasis. In comparison, less emphasis is placed on undersecretaries of government institutions as well as bodies such as the A'shura Council and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry and their members although they are also government stakeholders. The heads of these two organisations are appointed by the government, and they rely on government funding for their operations. The following excerpt shows the emphasis placed on different government stakeholders and their involvement in the planning process:

“Oman Vision 2020 was prepared by the Ministerial Council... and started by forming seven committees to provide reports about the economic sectors that operate in Oman ... This committee [the one dedicated for Industry, Tourism and Commerce] was headed by His Excellency, the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Commerce, and included the Undersecretaries of the government organisations related to the sector, some A’shura members, and some members of the Chamber of Commerce”. (p. 17).

The excerpt clearly identifies the Ministerial Council as the one that developed the plan. The committee chair is also clearly emphasised i.e., the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Commerce, whereas other members of the committee are not specifically identified. The phrase *‘the Undersecretaries of the government organisations related to the sector’*, is used to refer to the government officials without identifying them or their organisations specifically. Representatives of the A’Shura and the Chamber of Commerce are also referred to generically, using the word *‘some’* and without any nominations or emphasis, i.e., *‘some A’shura members’* and *‘some members of the Chamber of Commerce’*. Possibly, the intention was to communicate that the responsibility for planning was at the highest levels while there is also wider representation on the different committees for planning. However, the lack of real emphasis on the wider committee membership may indicate only a token regard for wider inclusiveness in the planning process even amongst government stakeholders themselves. What is strikingly revealing is that the document excludes all other potentially relevant stakeholders from the committee dedicated to Industry, Tourism and Commerce, even the private sector. In fact, there is an absence of any role for non-governmental stakeholders in the process of the planning.

The document states that the committee *“was tasked with evaluating the previous years’ experience of the sector and to come up with a vision for the Omani economy in 2020”* (p.17). However, the document does not indicate how the committee carried out this evaluation or if it consulted with other stakeholders in preparing its reports. Consider this excerpt from the document that describes the committee’s evaluation process:

“The seven committees submitted their reports to the steering committee that was chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister for Economic and Financial affairs with 14 Ministers as members...The steering committee reviewed and evaluated all the reports and approved the final reports which were then adopted as medium and long-term plans

that would be used for the Five-Year Development Plans ... Once these reports were reviewed by the steering committee, the government presented them to as many local people as possible” (p.18).

As this excerpt shows, the bulk of the evaluation and planning is carried out by the committees that are fully composed of government representatives. The power of the steering committee chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister is very clearly positioned at the beginning of the sentence. The text places further emphasis on the steering committee’s members (*Minsters*) and their role of the steering committee in approving the plans by positioning it in the beginning of the sentence. Scant attention is given to the planning process itself through which the plans were developed by the seven committees. The excerpt also attempts to indicate that local people were involved but the choice of the word ‘*presented*’ reveals that their participation as potential stakeholders in planning was extremely nominal. Furthermore, they are discursively generalised as ‘*local people*’ with no further details about who these people are, how they are selected and how many there were.

4.3.1 Control of Planning vs ‘Unanimity’ of Outcomes

The discourse in the Vision 2020 document indicates that the government maintains strong and tight control over the whole process of tourism planning with significant lack of consultation with or contribution from other stakeholders. However, this reality contradicts the government’s declared aim of delegating much of its control over the future of the country’s development to the private sector, as stated in the document itself. Consider this excerpt:

“When preparing its Vision 2020, the government aimed at shifting its role from the main leader, developer and generator of the economy into a government that gave an opportunity to the private sector to take a much greater part in the country’s development.”. (p.1).

The language here is quite deliberate in that it is intentionally vague; while the government is stating that its intentions were to shift the role of leading, development and generator of the economy from itself to the private sector by giving it ‘*an opportunity*’ to participate, the extent of the participation or the opportunity itself is not addressed. However, the document also indicates that the private sector was only

represented in the planning process through the representative (s) of the Chamber of Commerce on the planning committee. As noted earlier, the Chamber of Commerce is a government funded organisation, and its chair is appointed by His Majesty. Hence it is debatable how effectively representatives of this organisation can express the voice of the private sector within a committee which is dominated by government representatives.

Nevertheless, ‘*unanimity*’ is emphasised as an important consideration in developing Vision 2020 and the discourse indicates that unanimity refers to obtaining views and recommendations of some of the identified stakeholders. The excerpt below shows that the government arranged a two-day conference to get feedback on the plans developed by the committees. However, despite the emphasis on unanimity and the apparent intention by the government to cede control or involve the private sector stakeholders, those who were present or invited to the conference were mainly from the government and government appointed or elected members. An element of wider stakeholder representation was obtained through ‘*experts*’ from other countries and international organisations such as the World Bank. This process of getting their views and recommendation was referred to as ‘*unanimity*’.

*“Unanimity was an important basis for building Vision 2020, so they organised a conference of 5 sessions: three closed sessions and two open sessions. Invitees for the open sessions included the committees that developed the reports, the steering committee, other ministers and government officials, some A’shura members, some members of the Chamber of Commerce, and experts from other Arabic countries, East Asian countries, industrial countries, Latin American countries and international economic organisations such as, the World Bank... While invitees for the three closed session involved, government senior officials (Ministerial Council members, Undersecretaries, government consultants) ...**The recommendations from this conference were used for implementing Oman Vision 2020 ...** The Ministerial Council discussed the reports and the recommendations generated from the three closed conference sessions... and made recommendations to His Majesty... who subsequently chaired a Ministerial Council meeting and approved the policies and the main elements of these reports after he had instructed the Council to make some changes to them”* (p.12).

Although the expressed intention in the first sentence is to build ‘*unanimity*’ on the plans, there is no reference to what transpired in the two ‘*open*’ sessions in which the international experts had participated or what was the outcome. Consider the sentence in bold in the above excerpt. This sentence by referring to the recommendations from ‘*this conference*’ is an attempt to combine the outcomes from both the ‘*closed*’ and ‘*open*’ sessions, without revealing what happened in the ‘*open*’ sessions. The same sentence goes on to say that the recommendations from the conference were used for ‘*implementing Oman Vision 2020*’, rather than the plans themselves. Clearly nothing of what was discussed in the conference informed the plans themselves and this gives a strong signal that what was discussed were issues relating to implementation of the plans rather than the content of the plans.

Furthermore, the next sentence explicitly refers to the recommendations of the ‘*closed*’ sessions: ‘*The Ministerial Council discussed the reports and the recommendations generated from the three closed conference sessions... and made recommendations to His Majesty*’. So, while the excerpt is silent about the outcomes of the ‘*open*’ sessions, it explicitly states what happened to the outcomes of the three ‘*closed*’ sessions. Hence, there is a clear contradiction in the text between the claim for ‘*unanimity*’ and the process of considering outcomes or ‘*recommendations*’ as clearly, only the recommendations from the closed sessions that were attended by senior government officials were taken forward. There is also no reference to any process of consensus building in any of the five sessions or thereafter which would be obviously required for ‘*unanimity*’. If one were to argue that the three closed sessions had considered views generated from the two open sessions, there is nothing in the document to indicate how the government in the closed sessions dealt with these views. Hence it can be concluded that wider stakeholder participation even from the ‘*experts*’ in the planning process was nil or extremely limited as they participated in the ‘*open*’ sessions. The references to the Ministerial Council as having discussed the outcomes and the final approval of His Majesty, the Sultan are formalities in the government approval process only after which can Vision 2020 be published or implemented.

To summarise, the process of developing and approving Vision 2020 can be divided into five stages. First, there was the preliminary information preparation stage carried out by the Ministry of Development, which commenced in 1993 with an ‘*18-month census* of

the population and ‘*all the different sectors in Oman*’ (MoNE, 2007, P.3). The second stage involved evaluation of the data and the actual planning work carried out by the seven government appointed committees. The plans were then approved by the Ministerial Council. In the third stage, a conference was arranged with closed and open sessions to generate ‘*unanimity*’. The fourth stage was the discussions of recommendations from the conference by the Ministerial Council. The final stage Vision 2020 is the approval by His Majesty. During these five stages, there is no evidence of any wider stakeholder participation. Oman Vision 2020’s claim to stakeholder participation is through the representation of the A’shura, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (in the second and third stage) and the presence of experts at the conference (the third stage). All stages reveal full government control in the entire planning and decision-making process at all stages including collection and analysis of data, discussion and preparation of plans, inclusion of stakeholders and decisions on what should be included or excluded, and the final approval of Vision 2020.

In conclusion, four stakeholder groups were involved in the development of Oman Vision 2020: the government, A’shura members (representing the public) and Chamber of commerce (nominally representing the public and the private sector), and international experts. Both the A’shura and the Chamber of Commerce and industry being established and appointed by the government, cannot be really considered to be fully representative of either the public or the private sector. Nor were there bodies collaborating or participating in the development of the plan. Hence as shown, non-government stakeholder participation was very limited and would have had little impact on the plans themselves. Despite the stated claims that Vision 2020 is intended to shift the government’s role in economic development and growth to the private sector, and that there was unanimity on the plans, the government was the single stakeholder that was involved in the planning process and the development of the plans. Hence, Oman Vision 2020 can be described as a top-down, governmental product. There was no real consultation with the public, nor were other stakeholders involved. This provides a picture of how a developing non-democratic country, such as Oman engages in planning where wider stakeholder participation which is a key element of sustainable tourism planning practice is omitted.

4.4 Oman Tourism Strategy (OTS) 2040: Overview

In 2014, Oman's Ministry of Tourism hired a prestigious international consultancy company called THR which is based in Spain to prepare the national tourism strategy for Oman for the next 25 years. In 2016, THR produced a comprehensive 1,200-page report (OTS 2040) which outlined the existing features of tourism planning in Oman and laid out strategies for the development of Oman's tourism sector until 2040. OTS 2040 discussed the existing condition of the tourism sector in Oman and the potential opportunities for growth. THR (2016, p. 43) states that in order to achieve the desired growth, the strategy used guiding principles which were deemed suitable for Oman's tourism resources. These guiding principles included enhancing the standard of living of the Omani people, sharing the benefits from tourism between the different stakeholders, protecting local culture and heritage, and preserving the environment.

The full report of OTS 2040, however, has not been made publicly available by the government of Oman and instead, a partial version was published. This version comprised 375 pages which included sections on the data collection methods used by the consultants, their findings, and their recommendations for tourism development until 2040. The shorter version is divided into an introduction and four main sections and contains a total of 14 chapters. Part one of the report focuses on envisioning the strategy which includes among others, the guiding principles, current issues in the tourism sector, key stakeholder views, the rationale, and the mission statement. Part two focuses on the formulation of the strategy, the objectives, the direction, investments, market and marketing, human resources, legal and other issues needed for the strategy. Part three details the strategic components i.e., what drives the strategy, what are the key success factors; and what changes are required to enable the strategy to be successful. Part four discusses implementation of the report's recommendations.

The THR team used several data collection methods in order to develop the strategy, including 'site visits, interviews, workshops, road shows, plenary sessions and validation workshops' (THR, 2016, p. 27). The OTS 2040 document lays out the process by which OTS 2040 was developed. First, the consultancy team carried out site visits for a period of three weeks in Oman to understand the types of attractions that Oman has to offer. The team also collected data and input from a variety of stakeholders. Nine focus group sessions and 32 key informant interviews with government officials and private sector

employees were conducted. Focus group discussions with MoT employees were held to get the views of junior civil servants. A survey was carried out using a questionnaire with 50 tourism sector industry employees to obtain data on governance and marketing. These were followed by 12 road shows involving approximately 500 people from around the country to collect ordinary public opinion. Plenary meetings were also held with public and private sector stakeholders. All the data that were collected through these various methods were analysed and the findings were shared with around 100 experts in workshops in order to validate them. These validation workshops were the final steps taken by the consultants before the document was submitted to the government for approval.

4.5 General Presentation of OTS 2040

At the outset, it is worth examining how the tourism strategy for Oman for the next 20 years has been presented. In general, the OTS 2040 report looks extremely professional. It is well-presented and phrased in marketing language interspersed with beautiful pictures of tourism attractions in Oman. The plan is presented as benefitting all stakeholders which makes it difficult to identify imbalances or lack of inclusiveness. The report presents the proposed strategy very positively as an enabler of a rosy future for tourism in Oman. OTS 2040 is designed to persuade its audience, namely the decision-makers of its effectiveness and in many instances, this is done by presenting generic statements rather than providing exact information about what this rosy picture looks like. This suave discourse exists throughout the report and below are some excerpts highlighting this discursive theme:

“The Strategy is the starting point to drive Oman into a new era of tourism, inviting the world to visit and enjoy its beauty and hospitality whilst creating sustainable benefits for the Omani people. This will enable Oman to become one of the leading destinations offering the most authentic and “high touch” destination in the region” (p. 22).

“The Oman Tourism Strategy will generate a competitive advantage that will help Oman achieve superior financial performance, better quality of life for the Omanis and generate more attractive investment opportunities. Through Oman Tourism Strategy, the country will be well-positioned to pursue its path to prosperity and drive Oman towards becoming a high-quality competitive destination, one that attracts investors and

visitors from all over the world. Overall, the Oman Tourism Strategy will provide a strategic plan for the Government to successfully guide the tourism industry towards 2040” (p.23).

“The Oman Tourism Strategy will generate significant benefits for Omani citizens, the tourism industry, investors and tourists in different ways”. (p.24).

Quite clearly, the marketing discourse used by the THR experts conveys a very optimistic picture of the future of the Omani tourism sector through a plethora of positive benefits and qualities that will result from the proposed strategy, some of which are identified below:

- *a starting point to drive Oman into a new era of tourism*
- *inviting the world to visit and enjoy its beauty and hospitality*
- *creating sustainable benefits for the Omani people*
- *making Oman become one of the leading destinations offering the most authentic and “high touch” destination in the region*
- *generating a competitive advantage*
- *helping Oman achieve superior financial performance*
- *making a better quality of life for the Omanis*
- *generating more attractive investment opportunities*
- *enabling the country will be well-positioned to pursue its path to prosperity*
- *driving Oman towards becoming a high-quality competitive destination*
- *attracting investors and visitors from all over the world*

This discursive theme recurs throughout the OTS 2040 document as is evident in the following sections. The next sections present further analysis of the textual discourse to shed light on the role of the different stakeholders in the development of OTS 2040, the extent of their participation and the inherent power dynamics between them.

4.6 The Stakeholders in OTS 2040

Understanding how stakeholders are constructed in the document reveals much about how stakeholder participation was sought to prepare OTS 2040. The document includes a wide range of references to stakeholders in tourism planning. There is clear emphasis on the importance of tourism benefitting all stakeholders and it argues that *“the success*

of the Strategy depends on Oman's ability to create value for all the related stakeholders: tourists, collaborators, investors, and society" (THR, 2016, p. 26).

OTS 2040 regards the current lack of stakeholder participation and poor stakeholder relations and management in Oman as major challenges facing Oman's tourism development. It points out that there is little collaboration at all stakeholder levels, leading to unsatisfactory decisions and outcomes for tourism. Consider the following excerpt which explicitly highlights these weaknesses:

"Poor collaboration and cooperation among stakeholders hinder Oman's tourism industry development. There is a lack of aligned decision taking ...Private sector collaboration is also an important issue, industry communication is poor, and there are few professional associations or other business networks to align decisions, create partnerships, or improve standards and skills. Public-private stakeholder collaboration exists but does not often lead to the desired results and is missing commitment from both ends" (THR, 2016. pp.51-52).

However, despite the authors' stated importance of tourism stakeholders and their efforts to consult stakeholders whilst carrying out their research and planning for OTS 2040, the discourse does reveal that more attention was given to some stakeholders than others. Moreover, those stakeholders who were consulted, apparently did not offer concrete solutions to resolve the weaknesses with regards to public-private collaborations and cooperation that had already been identified by the authors themselves. The data and the views collected depended on who were considered to be the more important or primary stakeholders. Similarly, the discourse on future developments and the implementation of OTS 2040 does not consider the role of all stakeholders. The next sections show that the level of '*collaboration among the different stakeholders*' in the planning process for OTS 2040 although very inclusive of private-sector participants did not adequately address the '*poor collaboration and cooperation among stakeholders*' that had been identified at the outset.

4.6.1 Key Stakeholders

A main reason for the unequal representation of stakeholders in the participation process, is that only some stakeholders are considered as key stakeholders (this is explicitly stated), while others are considered marginal to Oman's tourism development. While the latter view is not explicitly stated, this is the impression gained through the critical

discourse analysis. Whether the consultants adopted this view on their own or were directed to do so by the government as represented by the MoT is unclear.

A feature of the methodology employed by THR is that they identify only two stakeholder groups as the key tourism stakeholders: the public sector i.e., the government and the private sector.

“Strategy will call upon collective and coherent efforts from all stakeholders in order to see this project through successfully. Hand-in-hand, the public sector and private enterprises, both local and international, will have to come together and methodically implement the Strategy in its successive phases, with tight coordination and determined goodwill”.” (p.4).

At the beginning of the above excerpt, the text refers to ‘*all stakeholders,*’ but at the end of the excerpt the stakeholders are described as ‘*the public sector and private enterprises.*’ OTS 2040 refers repeatedly to the two key tourism stakeholders, the government (public sector) and the private sector, whose ‘*hand-in-hand*’ collaboration is vital to its implementation. The use of the phrase ‘*hand-in-hand*’ also reveals an effort to raise the status of the private sector ‘*efforts*’ to an equal level of importance with the government’s ‘*efforts.*’ The statement that the ‘*strategy will call upon collective and coherent efforts from all stakeholders*’ also makes it also clear that the term ‘*all stakeholders*’ refers to all the various government and private sector stakeholders only and not the wider stakeholder groups. Hence wider stakeholders such as public and local communities and their representatives are not considered essential to the success of the strategy itself. This excerpt should also be considered again the statement that the success of OTS 2040 itself depends on the ability ‘*to create value for all related stakeholders: tourists, collaborators, investors, and society*’ (THR, 2016, p. 26). This then indicates a view that collaboration between the government and the private sector is enough to create such value for all stakeholders and that wider stakeholders need not be involved in the tourism planning process as they are merely passive but lucky recipients of the resulting benefits.

In the first excerpt below, reference is again made to ‘*public and private industry stakeholders,*’ while in the second excerpt below, the same two stakeholders are referred

to more generally as tourism stakeholders, again implying that as far as tourism is concerned, they are the ones who are important.

“personal interviews and nine focus groups were conducted within the Ministry of Tourism, other Ministries and relevant public and private industry stakeholders” (p.21),

“minor levels of collaboration, association and involvement among tourism stakeholders (public and private)” (p.55).

Elsewhere, as in the operational aspects of OS 2040, the document identifies key stakeholders as government officials and ‘others’ (for example, see excerpt below). The sentence below, starts with a reference to ‘key stakeholders’ and while specifically identifying some of them, generalises the role or importance of ‘other stakeholders and organisations.

“key stakeholders are needed to have the OTS operate as it should: these are the Inter-Ministerial Committee for Tourism, the Office of Strategy Management, the Ministry of Tourism and other stakeholders and organisations” (p.26).

Throughout the document, there is an explicit and often implicit demarcation between the ‘key stakeholder’ i.e., government, closely followed by the private sector, while other stakeholder groups are placed far behind the two groups. When the government and the private sector are designated as ‘tourism stakeholders’, or ‘key stakeholders’ or just ‘stakeholders’ the implication is that they have a direct influence on the outcomes of the tourism sector. All other stakeholders are mentioned generally, particularly about enjoying the benefits from tourism, but they are never referred to in relation to their importance to tourism development or as participating in deciding the outcomes.

To understand how stakeholder participation was carried out, we need to look at how stakeholders are constructed in the document from two aspects. First, how the text refers to stakeholders when developing the strategy and second, how the text refers to stakeholders in any recommendations for the future roles of stakeholders in tourism development.

4.7 Stakeholder Participation in Developing OTS 2040

Understanding how stakeholders were involved in developing the OTS strategy can be gained by analysing the list of stakeholders referred to within the document and their stated interactions with the consultants. Critical discourse analysis sought to identify where the power of decision making is concentrated and the extent to which stakeholder participation is present or absent. To understand these aspects, the researcher identifies how the text constructs stakeholders such as the government, the private sector, the local community, media and, academia.

The analysis of the discourse describing the phases of consultation reveals variations in how different stakeholders are referred to. The list of 32 stakeholders who were interviewed as shown in Figure 1, looks to be varied and quite comprehensive but it is worth scrutinising it further. A breakdown of this list shows that it includes government representatives and some representatives from the private sector. The interviewees include 7 government officials out of which 4 belong to one government body which is the MoT, while the other 3 belong to public sectors related to heritage, education, and funding. The list also includes 9 representatives of governments owned companies, 5 funding bodies and 2 educational institutions. The remaining represent ongoing national development projects under the supervision of the Supreme Council of Planning (SCP) which can impact the tourism sector as well. These are the Oman Spatial Plan and the Musandam Master plan.

3 Interviews	32 interviews
1. Director of Finance of MoT	June, 2014
2. Director of Tourism Projects of MoT	June, 2014
3. Director of Investment Services of MoT	June, 2014
4. Director of Tourism Promotion of MoT	June, 2014
5. Acting Director of Regions of MoT	June, 2014
6. AD Duqm Special Economic Zone Authority	July, 2014
7. Oman Air	July, 2014
8. National Ferries Company (SAOC)	July, 2014
9. Ministry of Manpower	September, 2014
10. Ministry of Defense Pension Fund	September, 2014
11. Omran	September, 2014
12. PAIPFD	September, 2014
13. OMAGINE	September, 2014
14. Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre	September, 2014
15. Oman National Investment Corporation (ONICO)	September, 2014
16. The Wave	September, 2014
17. Zubair Corporation Fund	September, 2014
18. Oman Sail	September, 2014

OMAN TOURISM STRATEGY 46

19. Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre	September, 2014
20. SADAF	September, 2014
21. Trowers & Hamlin	September, 2014
22. Oman Brunei Investment Company	November, 2014
23. German University of Technology in Oman (GUTECH)	November, 2014
24. Ministry of Heritage and Culture	December, 2014
25. The Research Council	December, 2014
26. Supreme Planning Council Five Year Plan Project	December, 2014
27. Oman Chamber of Commerce & Industry Tourism Committee	December, 2014
28. National Centre for Statistics and Information	January, 2015
29. Supreme Planning Council	January, 2015
30. Oman Spatial Strategy	January, 2015
31. Tourism Education Strategy	January, 2015
32. Musandam Master Plan	January, 2015

Figure 1: Stakeholders Interviewed for OTS 2040 (source: OTS (2016), p. 45)

As noted in the previous sections, the MoT had a higher representation in the interviews compared to other stakeholders, e.g., four out of seven government officials are from the MoT, while the other three belong to sectors related to heritage, education, and funding. The list also includes nine representatives of government-owned companies, five funding bodies and two educational institutions. The remaining nine represent ongoing projects under the supervision of the Supreme Council of Planning (SCP) and related to national development but can impact the tourism sector as well. These include the Oman Spatial Plan and Musandam Master plan among others. So, nearly all the 32 stakeholders are linked to the government in some way.

Moreover, the MoT had a higher representation in the interviews than any other stakeholder group. This may be understandable given that MoT is the apex body in charge of tourism planning and development. But the prominence of the MoT is enhanced by the nomination strategies to refer to the participants in the interviews (Figure 1). The text uses different nomination strategies to refer to the participants in the

interviews (Figure 1). Participants from MoT are referred to by their full designation and organisational affiliation e.g., ‘*Director of Finance MoT*’, ‘*Director of Tourism Projects MoT*’, and ‘*Director of Tourism Promotion MoT*’, thereby emphasising their superior status in comparison to others who are only referred to by their organisation e.g., ‘*Oman Air*’ and ‘*the Wave*’ and so on. The distinction reflects the stronger emphasis given to participants from MoT compared to others in the initial stages of research and planning of OTS 2040. This emphasis is explicitly stated in the following excerpt which states that the consultants (THR) and MoT worked together to analyse the current situation.

“In developing the Oman Tourism Strategy and establishing sustainable growth targets, the Ministry of Tourism and THR undertook a detailed process to identify and analyze the current situation and the key issues that need to be addressed” (p. 45).

The MoT was also considered the main source of information for the situation analysis methodology used by the consultants as shown by this sentence “*Situation analysis methodology overview [retrieved through looking at] reports and documents from MoT 250*” (p.45).

This emphasis on the high level of participation by MoT by the consultants is unsurprising given that MoT is the body that authorised the consultancy. However, it does give MoT more power and influence on the process and outcomes from the outset in comparison to all other stakeholders. The excerpt below highlights the fact that all results and outcomes from the situation analysis were presented and discussed with MoT before further actions were taken, further emphasising the level of MoT influence on OTS 2040.

“Several meetings were held with the internal team of the MoT to present the latest project results and obtain inputs and feedback” (p. 27).

In the next list of participants (Figure 2), the nomination strategies used are different to the interview list in Figure 1.

4 Focus Groups	9 Focus Groups
1. Hotels	June, 2014
2. Tour Operators	June, 2014
3. Airlines	July, 2014
4. Environment	September, 2014
5. Heritage and culture	September, 2014
6. Education	September, 2014
7. Statistics	September, 2014
8. Transport	September, 2014
9. Social responsibility	February, 2015

Figure 2: Stakeholders in Focus Groups (source: OTS (2016), p.46)

The nomination strategy used to refer to FGD participants in OTS 2040 focuses either on the type of business activity represented by the participants such as ‘Hotels’ and ‘Airlines’ or the wider sector the participants represent e.g., ‘Environment’, ‘Education’, and ‘Transport’ or by the nature of topics discussed, e.g., ‘social responsibility’. The list includes tourism related businesses (private sector), academia, environment and logistics but gives no indication whether the latter stakeholder participants are from the private or public sector, or NGOs. The list is silent about the participants’ designations, names of organisations and only alludes to the nature of the issues discussed. The reasons could be that the authors did not consider their identify to be relevant to the strategy or they did not want to place overt attention to who these players were and wanted to preserve their anonymity.

4.8 Stakeholders Not Included in the Development of OTS 2040

While the participants in the interviews and FGDs listed in Figures 1 and 2 are indeed key in developing the tourism strategy, the focus seems to be on larger private sector players (hotels, airlines, tours operators), while small and medium establishments, which there are many in Oman, such as food and beverage outlets, restaurants that are licenced as tourism establishments, and freelance tour guides have been excluded.

There seems to be no participation by any of the regional governorates despite the fact that OTS 2040 does includes the future direction of tourism development in these regions. Although, the report identifies the Ministry of Regional Municipalities & Water Resources as one of the “key stakeholders from the public sector involved in the execution program” (p.309), it does not indicate that they were included in the consultative process. Neither the Ministry of Environment was included the consultative process, although it is also identified as having a key role in strategy execution. There is also no mention of any participation in either the interviews or focus groups by elected

representatives, community leaders, or environmental NGOs. However, OTS 2020 does state that the public (local community) was involved through road shows to collect opinions and feedback at the beginning of the preparation of the strategy:

“Road shows in the Governorates (500+ people reached) ...to inform stakeholders about the OTS and obtain opinions, inputs, suggestions and recommendations” (p.27).

OTS 2040 defines a road show as: *“a series of events across different geographic regions and cities advocating an idea or agenda” (p.13)*. It states that *“ten road shows were completed, visiting all Governorates, except for Muscat” (p.27)*. Quite why there was no road show held in Muscat is unclear, especially as OTS 2040 noted it is the most important governorate in Oman being the capital city and hosts several tourism attractions:

“The Grand Sultan Qaboos Mosque, an extraordinary piece of modern Islamic architecture in Muscat”, (p. 88).

“the Royal Opera House in Muscat”, (p.90).

“A high concentration of rooms is in Muscat Governorate, with 53% of the total hotel rooms”, (p.33).

There is also no mention in OTS 2040 about the topics discussed, the process, or outcomes of the roadshow or how they were managed. Merely stating that the roadshows were aimed at *“advocating an idea or agenda”*, reflects a basic level of consultation that does not align with the real stakeholder participation that OTS 2040 itself supports. There are also other relevant governmental and non-governmental stakeholders whose views were not sought, such as the media, environmental NGOs, and job-seekers despite the acknowledgement that the tourism sector was *“not attractive for most Omanis. It is a challenge to find talented Omanis willing to work in the sector” (p. 51)*.

4.9 Expert Stakeholders

Several ‘validation’ sessions of OTS 2040 were held with more than 100 stakeholder ‘experts’. These sessions as indicated in Figure 3, were named, according to the scope of each discussion rather than the organisational or sectoral affiliations of the experts

consulted. Expert validation was sought on four main areas: vision and issue validation, strategy formulation, balanced score card, training and lastly, initiative validation.

9	Experts sessions	100+ participations
	Vision and Issues Validation	November, 2014
	Strategy Formulation	January, 2015
	Balanced ScoreCard Training	May, 2015
	Initiatives Validation	June, 2015

Figure 3: Expert Sessions (source: OTS (2016), p. 46)

The categorisation of these sessions as expert validation sessions shows the importance attributed to the experts in developing OTS 2040. These sessions were not intended for data collection as with the other stakeholder consultation activities, but for validating the final input for OTS 2040 before being put forward to the government for approval. The expert validation sessions acted like a stamp of approval that the data collected were reliable because they were vetted by experts who possess the relevant knowledge. This indicates the very strong influence that expert knowledge can have on the planning process.

Expert knowledge is a very significant source of power as depicted in the OTS 2040 document and their validation is intended to convince decision makers of the value of the proposed plan. The authors also portray themselves as guides who are able to know, as depicted in the plan they present. Consider the excerpts below:

*“Overall, the Oman Tourism Strategy **will** provide a strategic plan for the Government to successfully guide the tourism industry towards 2040”.*

And,

*“[The]benefits of Oman’s Tourism Strategy [is that it] **provides** the Government with clear guidelines and an implementation plan for the sustainable tourism development” (p.24).*

This power of expert knowledge is exerted by positively affirming that the plan, if followed, can lead to prosperity and by providing a plan *“for the Government to successfully guide the tourism industry towards 2040”*. This power of expert knowledge to ‘guide’ the government is reflected by positioning OTS 2040 (which is created by the experts) at the beginning of the sentence while the government is positioned at the end of the sentence. The excerpts also express a level of certainty and authority (consider

words in bold) that OTS 2040 will indeed guide the government successfully regarding the future development of tourism. In this way, the discourse implies the domination of expert knowledge over the government and other stakeholders.

4.10 The Future Role of Stakeholders as Recommended in OTS 2040

This section presents the textual analysis of excerpts that identify the future roles of stakeholders in tourism development and the implementation of OTS 2040.

4.10.1 The Role of the Government

Quite explicitly, the text draws a very positive picture of the government's (as represented by the MoT) ability to carry out their future roles and responsibilities in relation to OTS 2040. Consider the modal words (in bold) used together with positive phrases that imply a certainty or authority that the envisaged positive outcomes will indeed happen.

*“The MoT **will be** able to utilize the appropriate regulatory tools to improve the competitiveness of tourism services, and the system **will promote** public-private partnerships, facilitate increased investments and help improve the standards and quality of products and services in Oman” (pp.284-285).*

However, much of this positive picture about the MoT's capability to carry out future work is based on statements that express commitment by the MoT and the government, rather than on past record of achievement. The repeated emphasis on the government's commitment in the following excerpts, implies that any problems in the past in relation to tourism development was partly due to a lack of commitment on the part of the government in the past rather than any other problems or constraints. Consider the words in bold in the following excerpts:

*“**Strong Government commitment** to tourism development” (p.49).*

*“The Government **is committed** to initial and complementary investments” (p.49).*

*“The MoT **is fully committed** to progress and incorporate best practices” (p.48)*

*“The Government **shows a strong commitment** to create employment” (p.210).*

*“The Government of Oman is **committed to** Oman Air’s expansion” (p.33).*

There is also considerable rhetoric about the MoT’s and the government’s ability to coordinate and operationalise OTS 2040 through sustainable and accountable decision making. The use of modality in the following excerpts i.e., ‘*will have*’, ‘*will run*’, ‘*will lead*’ together with the positive outcomes again implies a level of certainty that the envisaged positive outcomes will indeed result as stated.

*“Desired situation and strategic question: Oman **will have** an efficient tourism governance system led by the Ministry of Tourism (MoT) and based on a framework of involvement and exchange among and between Government bodies and relevant stakeholders, thus enabling sustainable and accountable decision-making. The Oman Tourism Strategy implementation process **will run** smoothly as the highest Government authorities and Ministries involved act as sponsors and actively participate in the Oman Tourism Strategy implementation process” (p. 138).*

*“The MoT **will lead** the implementation of the OTS, coordinating with the relevant Ministries and other Government agencies through the newly created Inter-Ministerial Committee for Tourism (IMCT)” (p.138).*

“Provide a tourism governance system led by the MoT and highest Government authorities,” (p. 139).

The above statements seem to assume that affirmations by themselves are sufficient to ensure the OTS 20240 plans will be operationalised in the manner they are described. Indeed, as these statements are about the government or government bodies, the implication is that these bodies can accomplish whatever they choose to do. The reference to the ‘*MoT and highest Government authorities*’, in the last excerpt also implies that the tourism strategy will be endorsed by the government at the highest levels of authority and that the MoT has an equal role as the highest authorities when it comes to tourism governance. Whether these statements are merely intended to ensure that these aspects are adhered to by the government for the success of OTS 2040, they very clearly indicate the significant role that the MoT is expected to exert or play in implementing OTS 2040.

4.10.2 *The Role of the Private Sector*

The role of the private sector in the future success of OTS 2040 is also highlighted and significant power is attributed to private sector tourism businesses and investors. The private sector is repeatedly highlighted as being key to enable the strategy and this can be explained by the need for funding, as “vast private sector investment is needed to achieve the vision” (p.71). The following excerpt shows the importance placed on large private sector investments:

“The number of touristic clusters, and supporting infrastructure needed, will be difficult to develop without large private sector investments” (p.60)

The emphasis and focus on the government and the private sector as the two key stakeholders and the importance of engagement and consensus between the two in developing the strategy are also continued in the recommendations for implementing OTS 2040 in the future. In the following excerpts, the use of words (in bold) emphasises a level of partnership or shared engagement between the two stakeholders as this considered fundamental to the strategy.

*“The Core Strategy will lead numerous future decisions, **both** in public and private sectors, therefore, it is imperative to have a reasonable consensus about it” (p. 303).*

*“Providing leadership and create engagement in terms of tourism by **both** the public and private sectors” (p. 115).*

*“**Both** the MoT and the private sector will have access to fundamental information and intelligence to manage their business through better-informed decisions. ... the tourism industry **will find** in these mechanisms a repository of relevant information and an excellent channel to interact with the MoT and other relevant private and public stakeholders” (p. 115).*

The last excerpt above also attempts to promise solutions that address weaknesses in public and private sector collaboration. The statement implies a promise that the tourism industry i.e., tourism businesses ‘will find’ solutions that address problems of lack of information and effective channel of interaction with the MoT and other government stakeholders. Hence this reveals a current lack of information sharing and resulting

power yielded only by the government and attempts to share information and power with tourism businesses. It is clear that the government as well as the private sector should or will have more influence in future decision-making. The report is quite explicit on this point, as can be seen in the use of modal words and other positive qualifiers (in bold) that emphasise the future role of the MoT, government and the private sector:

- *The MoT **will** lead*
- *system **led** by the MoT and highest Government authorities*
- *Both the MoT and the private sector **will** have access to fundamental information*
- ***Providing leadership** and create engagement in terms of tourism [by] both the public and private sectors*

4.10.3 Local Community Role: Passive Recipient Stakeholders

Oman 2040 makes various references to the public and local communities as ‘*local community*’ or ‘*local people*’ or ‘*locals*’ or the ‘*public*’. The discourse around local communities implies they are currently unaware of the benefits from tourism, as can be seen by the use of phrases and words such as ‘*unaware; create awareness; with a greater awareness*’, in the following excerpts (see words in bold):

*“Locals are **still relatively unaware** of the opportunities offered by tourism” (p.55).*

*“**With a greater awareness**, local community demand for assistance in assessing existing opportunities and assets could be stimulated and encouraged” (p.243).*

*“**Create awareness** among the local community about economic opportunities offered by tourism and increase the number of people willing to work in the industry” (p.116).*

This view of the public and local communities as lacking awareness is reflected in their lack of involvement in developing OTS 2040 as public representatives were not included in the consultations and the broader public was involved only through the road shows. The last excerpt above does indicate that a positive perception of tourism by local communities is required to ‘*increase the number of people willing to work in the industry*’. Other discourse around local communities also makes it clear that they have a key role in the sustainability of tourism development. For example, the following

excerpt explicitly reveals the authors' awareness of the impact that the public, local communities, and local entrepreneurs and their perceptions of fairness and equity can have on sustainability.

“Indicators related to social sustainability generally include the following features: local career opportunities, public participation and local community opinion, human respect, gender equality, tourism awareness and education, supporting local entrepreneurs and fair trade, site interpretation, etc”(p.207).

However, much of the emphasis in OTS 2040 when it comes to local communities or wider stakeholders is in terms of the importance of economic benefits from tourism accruing to them, as can be seen in the following excerpts.

“Motivate and empower the host community to reap the economic benefits of tourism...”. (p.116).

“... the benefits of tourism could become more immediately apparent and acceptable to the local community”. (p.243)

“...and the quality of life of the locals will improve.” (p.213)

“...in a manner that actively benefits and enhances the prosperity of the local citizens.” (p.210).

OTS 2040 implies that if local communities experience these positive economic benefits, they will be more open to tourism development. There is also the implication that by ensuring host communities do experience the economic benefits from tourism, their current lack of awareness of tourism and their lack of engagement will be addressed, and they will then be able to participate in the tourism decision making process in the future. This is explicitly stated in the excerpt below.

*By developing the tourism industry, new stable quality employment opportunities will be generated, income-earning possibilities will be multiplied, and thanks to the inflow of investment, new opportunities for the locals will arise and local businesses will be clearly benefited. The host community **will then** be committed to the tourism development and will participate in tourism choices that affect their lives, including the decision-making, planning and management processes* (p.115)

The use of the phrase *'will then'* above, reveals the view that the benefits for local businesses and locals, will ensure their commitment to tourism, which then makes them eligible to participate in decision making. Hence, in time, local communities evolve from being passive recipients of economic benefits from tourism to ultimately having adequate awareness of such benefits and they become committed to tourism development. At this stage they can create value by participating in *'the decision-making, planning and management processes.'* Therefore, currently, local communities are considered unwilling or unable to create value to the tourism sector, and so are assigned a passive recipient role for the value created by the government and the private sector.

4.10.4 The Media as a Mere Marketing Tool

OTS 2040 does not refer to the media as a stakeholder but only refers to the role that it could play in strategy implementation i.e., as a marketing tool to promote Oman's tourism sector. The international media and social media are also portrayed as a potentially negative source of information about Oman and therefore a potential threat. Such negative consequences are expressed as possibilities rather than definitive outcomes, as implied by the word *'could'* in the following excerpts and may result from negative incidents in the region or attracting the *'wrong'* type of tourists or negative portrayal by unsatisfied visitors:

*"Oman's peace and stability **could be** damaged image-wise by the international media coverage of political and security incidents in countries of the wider region" (p.53).*

Also,

*"Oman would continue not attracting as many tourists as it could; and it would continue to partially attract the "wrong" tourists, rather than those who value most what Oman has to offer...lead to unsatisfied Omani businesses and communities..., and unsatisfied visitors. ...[which] **could** harm the image of Oman as a tourist destination through their communication about Oman on social media" (p.53).*

The following excerpts reveal that the media is considered only as a marketing or promotional tool which can be provided with rich pre-prepared content, rather than as a potential stakeholder that can add potential value to the development of the tourism

sector. Although there is reference to a ‘media relations program’, in one of the excerpts, this seems to be more for the purpose of managing media more effectively. For example,

“Media will be approached with rich multimedia content providing fascinating insights into the travel experience within Oman” (p.119).

“This Media Relations program will have greater market impact and relevance than traditional advertising” (p.125).

“Providing regular communication of relevant tourism information. One or two top Omani media (TV or print) will publish in their economic / financial sections some news on the main tourism projects ..., etc.” (p.141).

“Deliver an exceptional tourism experience, focuses on the creation of exceptional, unique Omani experiences and a strengthened tourism quality system... As a result, the market, as demonstrated through media coverage and tour operator offerings, will recognize Oman as a uniquely special destination” (p.141).

Considering the media as an instrumental tool only for marketing purposes implies that it does not have an independent role and only plays a promotional role as decided by other stakeholders. Considering that OTS 2040 states that local communities and the wider public are currently lacking awareness of tourism, the role of the media as a stakeholder is not seen to be important in spreading awareness and educating the public about tourism benefits while also raising concerns of local communities. Moreover, the limited role that is assigned to the media in OTS 2040 is possible only if government control of media is all powerful such as in non-democratic countries and this could be the reason the discourse on the role of the media is constructed in this manner.

4.10.5 The Ambiguity in the Role of Academia

Academic stakeholders are variously referred to as ‘universities’ or ‘colleges’ or ‘educators’ in OTS 2040. There are contradictory statements in the construction of the discourse about the role of education. The discourse at times claims the existence of world class tourism education, possibly referring to certain specific institutions, for example:

“First class academic tourism programs exist, also with approaches involving international facilities” (p.47)

However, OTS 2040 is also critical of the tourism education available in Oman, which it says can create weaknesses in human capital within the sector. The lack of an educated workforce needed for tourism development in Oman is also highlighted as can be seen in the following excerpts:

“There is insufficient diversity in tourism education and training programs and on-the-job training tools and instructors. This, together with the deficient academic/educational offer is also the result of a missing Human Capital Strategy for the sector” (p.68).

“Limited availability of a well-trained local tourism workforce” (p.55).

After identifying these deficiencies, OTS 2040 calls on academic institutions to step up to the challenge to *“Ensure the workforce are well-trained and motivated via Omani Centers of Excellence with qualified educators and trainers, as well as Satellite Tourism Training centers capable of delivering new training programs” (p. 130).*

The inclusion of ‘*qualified*’ educators and trainers in the above excerpt indicates the view that academic institutions at present do not have qualified educators and that once there are qualified educators, the work force would be ‘*well trained and motivated*’. The recommendation for Satellite Tourism Training Centers that are ‘*capable*’ of delivering new programs also indicates that it is doubtful that existing training centres are capable of delivering new programs. OTS 2040 does note that *“attracting and retaining talented Omanis to work in tourism and hospitality is challenging (p.53)”*. While the blame for the lack of qualified people seems to be placed on educational and training institutions, there is no further discourse on how these educational and training institutions are to address the issue of attracting Omani students who have the inclination and aptitude to work in the tourism sector. Nor does it say anything about how educational institutions can participate in the tourism planning dialogue, so that they can align their offerings according to expectations or change the current negative perception of the community regarding careers in tourism.

4.10.6 Main Stakeholders for the Implementation of OTS 2040

OTS 2040 emphasises that ‘one of the most important components’ for successful execution of the strategy is engaging with the ‘main stakeholders’ (see Figure 4 below). It also explicitly identifies the government stakeholders who are considered key for the execution of the strategy. However, non-governmental stakeholders are just referred to as ‘private sector leaders’ thereby indicating that as in strategy development, only private sector enterprises, are considered to be the main non-government stakeholder for executing the strategy. The discourse is silent on the role of local communities, NGOs and the media and how these groups could potentially impact the successful execution of the strategy and thereby its sustainability. Hence this implies a belief that these stakeholders would not be able to adversely impact the implementation of the strategy in any way. The text is also silent about how the interests of wider stakeholders could be considered in the decision-making process.

9.5 Main stakeholders involved in the implementation

One of the most important components for the successful execution of the Strategy is engaging the main stakeholders involved in planning, development and support. This involves close collaboration between public and private sector leaders. Therefore, for each initiative involved, efforts will be made to create synergy and obtain a consensus on the actions for implementation.

The progress of each task would be reviewed through meetings with project team members.

The portfolio of the stakeholders will need to be updated annually to reflect sector growth and increasing diversity.

a. Public sector stakeholders

The key stakeholders from the public sector involved in the execution program are grouped into the following 4 categories:

Ministries

-
- | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ministry of Commerce & Industry• Ministry of Environment & Climate Affairs• Ministry of Heritage and Culture (including Museums)• Ministry of Manpower• Ministry of Transport & Communications | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ministry of Finance• Ministry of Education• Ministry of Higher Education• Ministry of Housing• Ministry of Regional Municipalities & Water Resources• Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries• Etc. |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Figure 4: Stakeholders for Implementation (source: OTS (2016), pp.309-311)

OTS provides a road map for the future implementation of the OTS 2040 (Figure 5) that includes an item to be achieved in the third quarter of 2020 which is to ‘strengthen stakeholders’ engagement into planning’. However, there is no discourse on how

stakeholder engagement can be strengthened. Instead, the report goes on to state how the role of the MoT and the Inter-ministerial council is very critical but there is an absence of discourse on how stakeholder engagement can be strengthened:

“to have the strategy operating, the key stakeholders identified are; the Inter-Ministerial Committee for Tourism, the Office of Strategy Management, and the Ministry of Tourism. The Inter-Ministerial committee is the most critical of all” (p. 26).

So, while OTS 2040 emphasises the importance of stakeholder engagement in the execution of the strategy, it again limits the role of stakeholders to the government and the private sector. Although the importance of the local communities in ensuring authentic tourists experiences and the importance of ensuring that tourism benefits do accrue to the wider community are highlighted in the report, as seen in the previous sections, but how these could be addressed is not considered as part of the strategy itself.

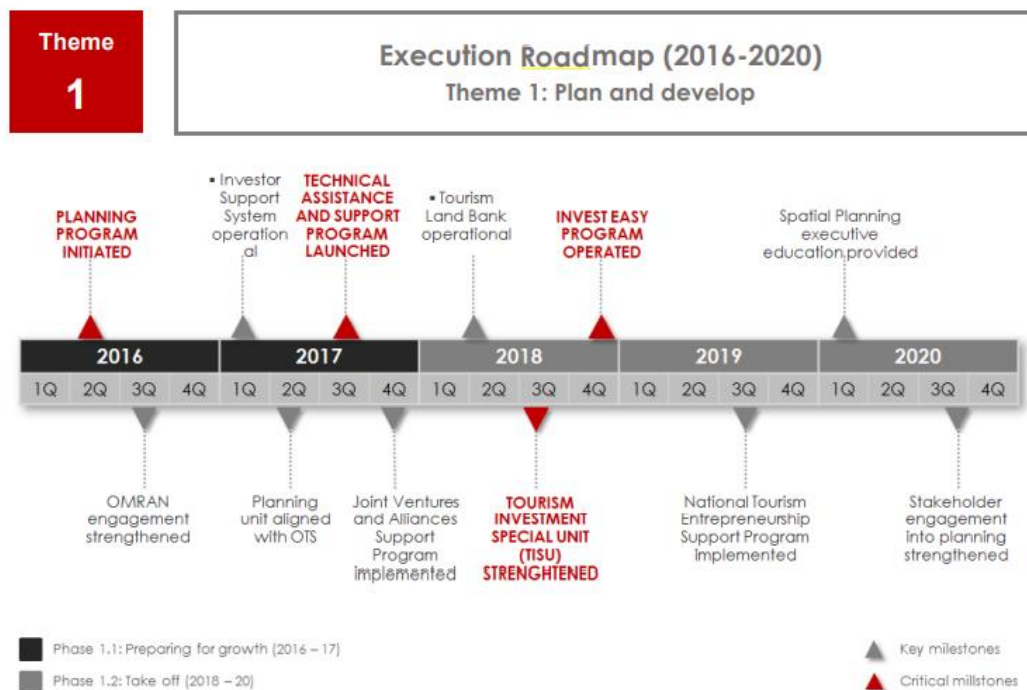


Figure 5: Road Map for Implementation: (source: OTS (2016) p. 17)

4.11 Stakeholder Power in OTS 2040

The selective discourse around the identification and construction of different stakeholders indicates the differences in power between the stakeholders: the experts

being at the top (even if not explicitly presented as a stakeholder), and the government followed by the private sector as the key or main stakeholders. All other stakeholders are at the bottom end with descriptive qualities attributed to these groups implying some current weakness that limits their engagement, for instance the ‘unaware’ local community, ‘deficient’ academic institutions and negative potential associated with the media and no mention of environmental NGOs. Irrespective of whether the authors’ conclusions about the stakeholders in this report is accurate or not, or how they arrived at them, these views shaped and reflect the extent of stakeholder participation in developing OTS 2040. It has also shaped the recommendations for stakeholder engagement for the execution of the strategy. As future stakeholder participation in the strategy execution stages is influenced and constrained by the initial views, there is no discourse for initiating wider stakeholder collaboration.

By using marketing discursive themes in writing and presenting the OTS 2040 document, and by including a range of consultation strategies with different stakeholders, the strategy is presented as the way forward with the potential to benefit multiple stakeholders i.e., all stakeholders. The power exerted by experts based on their knowledge and expertise is clearly evident in the development of the strategy at all stages including its validation. The authors’ identification of key stakeholders (apart from experts) includes only the government (as the party who commissioned OTS 2040) and the private sector (as investors). The latter two groups were allowed to influence the consultation process from the outset and during the development of the strategy. with the leading role played by the government as they commissioned the report. This power dynamics is set to continue forward to the implementation phase of the strategy as well. All input provided from wider public participation were apparently considered and subsumed in discussions with the government and private sector stakeholders or possibly in the validation process conducted by the expert teams. Thus, the perceived future roles of stakeholders will also lack the contribution of wider stakeholder groups in a manner that is truly participative or sustainable. These include the wider public and local communities, small and medium businesses, media, environmentalist NGOS and academic institutions.

4.12 Conclusion

Whilst Oman Vision 2020 was developed by the government with some token input from experts, the methodology for preparing OTS 2040 clearly indicates there was a move to be participative and obtain input from stakeholders other than the government. However, as the project was commissioned by the government, their influence on the consultants in the identification of key stakeholders, the participants, the style of the discourse and the plan's outcomes is evident.

Both documents identify the private sector as very important stakeholders; however, while Vision 2020 is vague about private sector involvement in its development and execution, OTS 2040 involves the private sector, (i.e., its bigger players), at all stages in developing and executing the strategy. Nevertheless, the key similarity between Oman Vision 2020 and OTS 2040 is the undisputed importance and control of government agencies in the development of the plans and their execution. Although OTS 2040 is significantly more inclusive in terms of private sector involvement and validation by the experts and is led by external consultants, the tourism planning and implementation systems remains an exclusive preserve of the more powerful stakeholders namely the government and the bigger investors with little meaningful participation by others. The present system of tourism planning in Oman is hierarchical not only in its decision making but also in its data collection and feedback with only key stakeholders and experts permitted to provide input. There is also a lack of suggestions or recommendations in OTS 2040 that can realistically pave the way for a more participatory approach to enhance sustainability of the sector in future. Hence, this ensures that the current lack of wider stakeholder collaboration identified in OTS 2040 will continue.

Chapter 5. Results of Key Informant Interviews

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the first stage of primary data collection, which comprised 45 in-depth semi-structured interviews with tourism stakeholders in Oman. The list of interviewees included officials from different government organisations involved in tourism-related activities, private sector tourism businesses (hotels of different categories, tour operators, transportation-related organisations, entrepreneurs, small establishments and tour guides), academics and students from government and private higher education institutions, environmental NGOs, journalists and CEOs of media companies, members of local communities and elected members from Municipal Councils (see Chapter 4, Section 3.4.3 for details of participants).

The stakeholder discourse from the KI interviews provided the data required for Research Objectives 1 and 2 of this study, which are to identify the challenges and weaknesses in the current tourism planning system in Oman and to assess stakeholders' readiness for, and perspectives, on an inclusive and participative approach to tourism planning in Oman. The KI interviews were designed to evaluate stakeholder awareness and knowledge of tourism, their views and experiences with the current planning process and the extent to which they felt that their opinions were considered by decision makers.

The critical discourse analysis of selected excerpts from respondents' discourse that reflect the key findings are presented in the sections below. As explained in Chapter 3, section 3.10.3, these findings and excerpts have been identified in accordance with Wood and Kroger's (2000) principle of saturation, whereby data analysis of respondents' discourse was carried out until no new category or meaning was identified.

5.2 The Perceived Benefits of Tourism

In order to assess stakeholder's awareness and understanding of tourism as a potentially rewarding economic sector, interviewees were asked for their views on the benefits and risks of tourism. The interviews revealed that most of the participants were very positive and aware about the potential benefits of tourism particularly the representatives from the private sector, the government, media, and academia. Although community representatives and NGOs were aware of potential economic benefits, they indicated that they had yet to see any benefits

from tourism activities. The discourse analysis presented in this section reveals the differences and similarities in how each stakeholder group sees these benefits accruing to the country and themselves.

5.2.1 Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities

The most recurring and emphasised benefits by participants were the potential employment opportunities for Omanis and the economic growth resulting from a strong and vibrant tourism sector. However, there were pertinent differences between stakeholder groups in how they viewed these economic benefits.

Private sector participants placed more emphasis on the financial opportunities for their own businesses by nominating the benefits using words such as ‘income, financially, returns, house, gold’ and etc. Many of them also linked these nominations directly to their own businesses or themselves, using pronouns at the beginning of the sentences, ‘*I get*’; ‘*I will*’; ‘*our main*’; ‘*we are*’ etc. Consider the words in bold in the following excerpts. KI-D33, a private sector stakeholder (PVS) in Dhofar stated that tourism brings in “*A lot of benefits, a lot of **income**, and tourism is like **gold***”. Another SME owner KI-D31(PVS) emphasised that “*financially **I get my income** from tourism*”. Similarly, KI-D35 (PVS), an owner and operator of a sea tours company, stated that: “***I get returns and income** from tourism and my income will be spent in Oman, **I will** build a house, use electricity, food, and water and will employ Omani staff. So, the **money** is circulated*”.

As seen in the above excerpt, KI-D35 (PVS) emphasised that his income creates opportunities for growth locally through his spending, as well as by providing employment opportunities for locals. Several private sector businesses stressed the value they can bring to the country through the jobs expected to be created for the local people or Omanis. For example, KI-M10, (PVS), emphasised the role his hotel plays in preserving traditional roles and knowledge through employment:

*“We provide **jobs** for the locals. Our hotel was basically built in a village... So, we have two employees hired for conservation [of turtles] from the local people who love this job, they have been involved with the sea since they were 10 years old”.*

Some tourism business participants, notably the international chains, tended to look at benefits that create value for their own chains rather than for other stakeholders or the national

economy. Consider bolded words in the two excerpts below where a senior hotelier refers not only to the benefits they obtain from foreign tourists coming to Oman, but also the revenues generated from their investment in hotels in other countries like ‘*Switzerland*’, ‘*Bali*’, ‘*China*’, and ‘*Russia*’. KI-M12, a Director General of an international hotel chain stated that these benefits accrued to his company because it is considered as market leader in Oman based on the success of the hotel chain in other countries.

*“Our main benefit is obviously the tourists because they bring the revenue to the hotel but also as a brand with GHM we have other properties in **Switzerland, Bali** and we are developing in China, so as we are more successful than other investors for example in **China**, they look at us [here in Oman] as being a successful leader in the market of tourism so then for us that is a benefit”.*

KI-D29 (PVS) a director of an international hotel chain in Dhofar emphasised expansion opportunities for his organisation and linked them directly to growth opportunities for Oman tourism from Russian customers “...we are going to build more hotels; we are going to bring charters from **Russia** to Salalah... there is a huge demand from the **Russian** market.”

In comparison, the choice of words by academics’ predicates or emphasise the benefits to the overall economic development and employment opportunities from tourism, and they tended to generally link all benefits to the local community or people. The theme of overall economic benefits was represented by phrases such as, ‘*reduces unemployment levels of locals*’, ‘*creates more jobs for Omanis*’ and ‘*provides more jobs for citizens*’. For example, KI-D32, a tourism academic stakeholder (TA), noted that tourism “*Improves the local economy as we bring in international tourists and provides more jobs for citizens*”. KI-M16 (TA) stressed that the “*Increased income improves infrastructure such as roads and buildings, and the local people will benefit from small business*”. KI-D34 (TA) said tourism “*provides attractions for local tourists, so that the money will stay in the country, and people do not necessarily travel abroad for tourism*”. Similarly, according to KI-D32 (TA), the positive impact of tourism sector is the “*strengthening of local economy and providing more jobs for citizens*”.

Government stakeholders tended to emphasise the expected economic benefits of tourism for the government as a proxy for the whole country rather than linking it to local communities, people, or businesses. Hence references to ‘*the government*’, ‘*the economy*’, ‘*the society or*

Oman' were repeated often by them in relation to economic benefits. This can be seen clearly in the following excerpt from KI-M11 (GO):

“The tourism sector is a compound sector. There are many benefits; first it is the direct economic benefits, supporting the tourism sector in terms of inflow of foreign currency through the tourism movement. The government also gets taxes from the tourism services and the visa fees. So, the benefits are great from this sector and the growth of the sector leads to growth in infrastructure and social development”.

Similarly, KI-D26 (GO) said, “... when you get economic returns you can use the money in developing **the infrastructure** as well”.

KI-M8 (GO) noted that there were direct and indirect benefits

“The direct[benefits] are for the investors of hotels and the tourism companies. But even the taxi driver is benefiting, the restaurants, the clinics, and the greatest benefit is for the national economy. When the national economy is benefited, job opportunities and investment opportunities are available”.

These indirect benefits or the multiplier effect were also emphasised by KI-M8 (GO) who noted that:

“.... Because the tourism sector does not just benefit tourism. But tourism might find investment opportunities in other sectors. We saw that businessmen come to Oman for tourism but then they decided to invest in Oman in sectors other than tourism. So, through tourism the whole of Oman is promoted”.

Closely tied to the perceived economic benefits was the participants' awareness of the importance of the sector for economic diversification. There was very little differences between the stakeholders in this regard. A government stakeholder KI-M11 (GO) emphasised the importance of the tourism sector for diversification thus:

“The direction is to reduce dependence on oil and to diversify income. I think now the directions are to increase revenues from the tourism sector...tourism is also seen as a growing industry unlike oil so there are opportunities for investments in the sector”.

Similar sentiments were echoed by other stakeholder groups. KI-M14 (TA) noted that because of the drop in oil prices “*we have no option but tourism, it is our safety net*”. KI-M13 (PFI) stated that with fluctuating oil prices, “*we look at tourism as a main and an important source of income for the national economy*”.

These findings indicate that private sector, government, academic and media stakeholders are aware of the importance of the tourism sector to the Omani economy and the wider benefits to the country. However, each stakeholder group tends to view or emphasise the benefits differently which reveals how such benefits inform the motivations of each stakeholder group in relation to tourism development. It is worth noting that all stakeholder groups including the government nominated the positive benefits either to themselves or the economy but were relatively silent about direct benefits to other stakeholder groups other than employment benefits.

5.2.2 Lack of Benefits for Some Stakeholders

A contrasting finding from the KI interviews is that local community members, its representatives and NGOs stated that the tourism sector has yet to bring any benefits either to themselves or the economy. Despite the emphasis and the range of benefits cited by other stakeholder groups, these positive affirmations were missing from the NGOs and local community participants. Analysis of their discourse reveals that these participants were aware of the potential benefits (consider words in bold below such as ‘*considered as an income*’, ‘*expect economic returns*’, ‘*positive returns*’, and ‘*it has potential*’; however, they also emphasised they were not seeing the benefits themselves within their communities, as can be seen by their use of expressions such as ‘*we do not get*’, ‘*not benefited*’, ‘*not yet seen*’ in the excerpts below (in bold). So Furthermore, these expressions are used in conjunction with others that do indicate their awareness of the potential benefits such as ‘*considered as an income*’, ‘*expect economic returns*’, ‘*positive returns*’, and ‘*it has potential*’ (also in bold). This reveals that local community representatives and NGOS are aware of the economic potential of a strong tourism sector, but these have yet to trickle down to the communities or at individual level.

For instance, KI-M42, a community leader, noted “*tourism is **considered as an income** for the country but at an individual level **we do not get any benefit***”. Similarly, KI-M3 said that “*Oman has beautiful attractions, but they are **not utilised** and **not benefited** from*”. KI-D38

emphasised that “As a citizen we **expect economic returns and positive returns, but we have not yet seen them**”. The NGO representative KI-M18 noted that “No, as an NGO we **do not get any direct benefit. But from tourism there is a lot of potential benefits**”.

5.2.3 Non-Economic Benefits

Non-economic benefits were identified by a few participants in terms such as cultural enrichment and sharing of experiences. These were mentioned by private sector SMES participants who have had opportunities to interact with tourists at a personal and professional level. KI-M17, a private company owner, noted that tourism opens local people’s minds to other cultures “I gain a lot of knowledge that I have never dreamt of. I learnt about other cultures, countries, how other people [live], and then there is the economic return as well”. Similarly, KI-D31, a SME owner referred to “Meeting with tourists, self-development and exchange of experiences”, as resulting advantages.

5.3 Perceived Risks of Tourism

5.3.1 Environmental Concerns

Several interviewees had a good understanding of the potential negative consequences if tourism development was not done in a sustainable manner. Sustainability was a term that was mentioned often by many participants in conjunction with environmental concerns. Furthermore, the most emphasised negative consequences resulting from tourism development were environmental concerns. One participant KI-30 (MCM) expressed his environmental concerns. “We have now seen many projects which did not harm the society, but we are worried about the environment”.

Many interviewees felt there is a symbiotic relationship between tourism and the environment i.e., they are mutually dependent and that projects which can harm the environment should not be permitted. KI- 8 (GO) asserted “We do not want to compare ourselves with the countries that **do not care** about environment. Rather we want to be like countries that cares about the environment”.

Similarly, from an investor point of view KI-13 (PFI) stressed that projects which can damage the environment in the long term should not be approved even if they have high economic returns in the short term. He affirmed “No we cannot invest in it. Because if you **harm** the environment then you will **harm** tourism”.

The use of the negative qualifiers such as, ‘*harm*’, ‘*do not care*’, in the beginning of the above sentences, indicates the participants’ intention to emphasise the potential environmental fall out. They also reveal that interviewees understand sustainability concerns and depict a symbiotic relationship between tourism and the environment i.e., they are mutually dependent and projects which harm the environment also harm tourism and should not be permitted.

However, the textual analysis shows contradictions in statements by government officials, as some claim that the government limits environmental damage from tourism development while other statements reveal that this is not the case and more needs to be done. MoT participants stressed that a lot of consideration is given to environmental issues when evaluating proposed tourism projects. They noted that MoT often works alongside international organisations such as the United Nations World Tourist Organisation (UMWTO).in evaluating such projects. As stated by KI-M8 (GO):

*“We have worked with the UNWTO in this regard where sustainability is considered, and the environment is considered. All of **our** projects have environmental criteria, and we have the Ministry of Environment with which **we** are cooperating for each project”.*

This was corroborated by KI-D39 (GO) who emphasised that:

*“this is **our** ministry policy, as much as you protect the environment and its sustainability you will assure a project’s sustainability and continuity. And vice-versa”.*

The stress placed on considering environmental protection and sustainability is quite evident in the above excerpts in which the MoT representatives directly attribute such attention to their ministry using nominative words such as ‘we and our’.

Such attention to environment protection was also seen in the discourse of Ministry of Environment (MoE) officials as the MoE is primarily responsible for environmental issues. For instance, according to KI-M22 (GO), a MoE representative:

*“My concern is the impact on the environment...for **us** any project that comes must have an environmental study... **We** study them and see the impacts. The studies are not done for only one season, they must be done through one complete year, because sometimes animals move from one season to another”.*

KI-M22 (GO) noted that although some investors may not take the environment into consideration in their planning and only focus on economic returns, these mistakes are corrected by the MoE.

However, the above claims of satisfying environmental considerations and ensuring sustainability were contradicted by other government participants as well as other stakeholders, who said that many tourism projects do not meet environmental sustainability criteria. Consider this statement from KI-D39 (GO), who is a high-ranking official from MoE in Dhofar:

“Now they [MoT] take locations and projects that do not meet with the sustainability goals. If the environment is made sustainable then your project will also be sustainable. Because these locations have a particular importance, and here we agree with utilising the environmental locations for tourism. But it should be done in a way that ensures its preservation, sustainability and protection from vandalism and exploitation...developing projects without proper operating and management’s plans and sustainable goals for the long run then there would be a problem”.

It should be noted that KI-D39 (GO) says that although MoE agrees with the utilisation of these resources for tourism purposes, they have concerns about the appropriateness of these locations or projects due to environmental concerns. But these concerns do not seem to be shared by MoT officials since they claim the MoT cooperates with the MoE in each project and requires its approval for all tourism or building projects in Oman. If MoE stakeholders believe that the MoT approves ‘*locations and projects that do not meet with the sustainability goals*’, then either the MoE was not involved in the process of vetting these projects and locations or their objections were overruled.

The excerpt above by the MoT official KI-M8 (GO): “*we have the Ministry of Environment with which we are cooperating*” shows that there is a sign of power or control over the MoE exerted by the MoT. The phrase ‘*we have*’ is translated from the Omani Arabic phrase ‘*عندنا*’ ‘*Indna*’, denoting ‘belonging’, almost as if the MoE belongs to the MoT. The inference is that the MoT has the power to listen to or disregard the recommendations of the MoE. Such occurrences were corroborated by KI-M20 (GO) another MoE official from Muscat, who clearly indicated a gap in planning and communication between the MoT and MoE; consider the expressions ‘*gap*’, ‘*not aware*’, ‘*surprised*’, in the following excerpt:

*“There is a **gap** in the planning between us and the MoT. Sometimes we get tourism projects at their final stages and **we are not aware** about them. We have our own environmental laws, such as environmental distance to be kept between beaches and projects, beach reclamation; ... **sometimes we are surprised** because some projects are signed and approved by other ministries and the investors want an environmental clearance from us. This issue delays the project, and then they say that the Ministry of Environment is delaying the project.”*

Several examples of environmental damage were cited by other stakeholders. In Dhofar, for example, green grazing land attracts many tourists from the GCC but KI-D35 (PVS) pointed out that many of the tourists “*drive on the grass*”, and KI-D25 (GO) said, “*some ... drive on the grass and destroy the green lands*”. As the soil is destroyed, the grass does not grow again for many years and it makes it hard for local herdsman to feed their animals. This has also led to conflict between the herdsman and tourists, as reported by KI-D38 (LCM): “*these tourists could be seen by young boys who are not mature and may fight with them*”. Participants employed modal words such as ‘should’ to emphasise that the government is not doing much about protecting the environment and natural resources. which they consider to be very important. Consider these statements: ‘*This **should** be sorted by the ministries*’, ‘*they **should** make walls or physical barriers*’, and ‘*it **should** be done in in a way that ensures preservation, sustainability and protection from vandalism and exploitation*’. Such discourse also indicates that local people e.g., those using the green lands for herding animals have some power or ownership and that this power should not be disregarded. Residents’ sources of living, if neglected or harmed, can lead to conflict. Sometimes, local residents succeed in their fight against developers, as illustrated clearly in this excerpt by KI-M6 (MS) “*They [MoT] **could not** implement the Cable Car because the **locals refused** digging in their areas because these mountains and land grazes **are owned** by the local people*”. This clearly reveals that there are instances that the local community has exerted their power to stop tourism related projects by the MoT.

However other stakeholders also noted that many tourism-related projects in Oman are built on sites that are not compatible with environmental sustainability criteria. Some tourism projects were said to have affected the marine environment negatively. An example given by KI-M10 (PVS) was that of the resort in which he works being built in an area that used to be a conservation area for turtles and was accessed only by boats previously. “*So, when the*

resort came it affected the environment". KI-M20 (GO) from the MoE validates such examples further by his statement: *"Some of the projects cause coastal erosion, this is a natural phenomenon, but human activities accelerate this issue"*. These statements reveal power imbalances between stakeholders focused on tourism development and those concerned with the environment protection. This power unbalance show that the MoE is probably not in a position to stop tourism projects even if they consider that some of these projects will cause environmental damage in the longer term, as stakeholders who are focused on immediate economic benefits have more power in decision making. It also reveals that despite statements to the contrary, the MoT's priority is not environmental protection, and when the interests of investors have to be weighed against longer term environmental issues, the economic considerations take priority.

Textual analysis also shows a level of frustration among local stakeholders about tourist behaviour during activities such as diving, dolphin and turtle watching which were reported to adversely impact marine life. KI-18 (NGO) said *"...some tourists even ride turtles, which reflects ignorance of the welfare of these sensitive marine animals"*. According to KI-M22 (GO):

"If you visit Wadi Shaab and Wadi Bani Khalid, you will find a lot of rubbish thrown by visitors. Even though the Ministry of Tourism have put up sign boards, still [the instructions are] not followed".

KI-D38 (LCM), a community leader, attributed negative tourist behaviour to a lack of monitoring by the relevant government organisations: *"Sometimes it [misbehaviour] happens as there is no monitoring from these organisations"*.

The above gap in monitoring negative behavioural consequences was underscored by the response of one of the participants, KI-M22 (GO), who stated that the MoE does not levy any fines for environmentally damaging behaviour such as littering as this was the responsibility of the municipalities not the Ministry: *"We do not have fines in our Ministry for throwing garbage, the Municipalities should have"*. When asked whether the municipalities have any rules regarding fines, he responded that he did not know. However, KI-M20 (GO) attempted to defend the MoE by claiming that MoE has inspectors monitoring diving activities in the sea: *"we do have observers and inspectors who go to the coast, even myself, I go to the coast to see the companies that are running diving activities, to check if they have diving licenses"*

or not”. But it seems the monitoring process is restricted to checking ‘diving licenses’ and other participants were dismissive of claims of environmental monitoring. According to KI-M22 (GO), another MoE official, the real issue was that most tourist sites did not have proper ‘management’ systems in place to manage tourist capacity and protect the ecological system. As a result:

“We have many visitors in our conservation areas - we have hundreds of visitors - without having an eco-tourism plan. At each attraction we should have proper management and decide on the number of visitors that can be absorbed in a way that does not put pressure on the environment, what kind of activities are not allowed such as burning fires”.

The above statement once again indicates a gap in planning and communication between the MoT and MoE as well as destination managers and implies a lack of clarity about whose role it is to monitor and ensure tourist sites have appropriate eco-management plans.

Private sector and SME participants claimed that they do their part and more to protect the environment. According to KI-M17 (SME), a small business owner, tourism companies “try to protect the environment”, e.g., they “clean the place where [they] go and make it cleaner than how it was **before** [they] arrived”. KI-M19 (SGCS) said “We do a lot of joint beach cleaning activities”. KI-D29 (PVS) emphasised his commitment to ensure greening of his hotel:

“Three years ago, I was running another hotel in another country and we were very proud to convert that hotel to what we call a green hotel and an environmentally friendly hotel with my team. The idea is to do the same thing here in Salalah. We have started the process. So, we started by segregating the garbage, the land, electricity use and so on”.

Stakeholders’ responses indicate that there is a high level of awareness of and concern for the negative environment consequences of lack of adequate planning and management of tourism activities. The views of stakeholders presented here shows that government claims of appropriate consideration of environmental issues are contradicted by government officials themselves as well as other stakeholder groups. Due to lack of communication. There appears to be several environmental issues that are not adequately considered or addressed in tourism planning and implementation.

5.3.2 *Impact on the Local Culture*

For some respondents, there was a trade-off between the economic benefits of tourism, and potential negative consequences on Omani culture and way of life. Several participants expressed the view that tourism will damage Omani culture. They were mostly concerned with the younger generation losing Omani values as a result of mixing with tourists in the tourism destinations. KI-M3 (LCM) a community leader from Muscat, noted that “*the new generations in their twenties are curious to discover these places and this may affect the local culture...and heritage, such as youth manners*”. The implication is that within these projects are tourists behaving with different cultural norms, e.g., drinking alcohol or dressing in a way that is not culturally acceptable in Oman and such exposure will erode the values of the younger generation.

KI-D30 (MCM), a municipal committee member from Dhofar emphasised that “*Opening up to tourism should be within our own values and culture. It should help the local community. But sometimes damages could happen if they do not respect the tribal and cultural values*”. Government officials such as KI-M21 (GO) also expressed concerns: “*We are worried most about the impact on culture and environment*”. Academics like KI-M15 (TA) felt that a negative aspect of tourism development is that “*it will affect the local people by [damaging]...the local culture and values*”.

However, several participants were more sanguine about cultural concerns. These participants are all government and private sector stakeholders, in addition to one local community member. KI-D38 (LCM), a community leader, who noted that their initial concerns have been allayed and that there is a positive effect on Omani culture and families. Consider the relegation of any worry about negative consequences to the past by repeated use of verbs in the past tense (in bold) in the following excerpt:

“*We **used to** be concerned that tourism would affect our culture and values, as it happened in some western countries. But we **saw** that tourism is protecting these cultures...We **used to** be worried about mixing our cultures and values with others and losing them. But when we **experienced** tourism’s impact on our families and society, we **knew** that it was not damaging*”.

This positive impact of tourism on Omani culture and society was reinforced by MoT officials such as KI-M8 (GO):

*“I think Omani society is immune to negative impact on culture because our culture is **not just lived seasonally** during festivals. **We live our culture in everyday life**: it’s part of our routine. I have **no concern about culture**. It is the opposite: I have started seeing many SMEs putting Omani fingerprints on tourism products. **This is one of the programmes available with us in the OTS 2040** and we will start implementing them. For example, what we call Omani brand and Omani signature”.*

This respondent is a senior government official who discursively justifies the emphasis on cultural tourism in OTS 2040 (see words in bold) by stressing that Omani culture is too deeply embedded to be harmed by tourists. Another MoT official, KI-M11 (GO), in the excerpt below, conveys the impression of cultural relativism i.e., what could be perceived as damage in one country might not be perceived as damage in another.

“...the culture of the society, what we could see as damage from tourism, maybe in the UK is not seen as a damage. For example, the way we dress, maybe some of the locals who live in closed societies see that the way tourists dress may not be suitable for our culture, however this could be the routine dress for other countries”.

The implication is that if Omanis tolerate different practices from tourists such practices will not harm Omani culture. Also, since regions within Oman itself differ from each other, what may be perceived as harmful to one local culture may not be so perceived by another. These officials may claim tourism poses no inherent risk for Omani culture or values probably because it is in their interests as stakeholders to promote and defend tourism development activities and OTS 2040. Moreover, according to some participants, even if tourism does change Omani culture, it may be for the better. For example, it may improve gender equality, as KI-M19 (SGCS) implies: *“When you see six Omani girls sitting in coffee shops and when they finish drinking, they each get a bill. So, each of them buys her own. This is due to the lift in the economy and its social effects”.* And as KI-M10 observed *“Now a bride does not just want to wear a white dress, but she wears red or yellow colours. Even Omani wedding ceremonies have now changed”.*

For these respondents, the community should adapt itself to cope with tourism requirements as KI-D26 (GO) puts it: *“the community must develop in accordance with what is happening”.* KI-M13 (PFI) felt that the effects of tourism are very positive and that fears of negative impacts on society *“are due to the lack of understanding. Many people do not*

understand what the tourism can offer”. The profiles of these participants show that they are senior government officials, investors and private sector stakeholders whose organisations have a strong interest in promoting cultural tourism. For example, KI-D26 (GO) represents an organisation that is in charge of organising local cultural festivals: *‘We do a lot of activities, such as the Salalah festival’*. KI-M19’s (SGCS), company rents out several properties for cafes and restaurants where many local boys and girls spend their leisure time, thus his comment on *‘Omani girls sitting in coffee shop’*. While KI-M13 (PFI) is investing in Nizwa, *‘We have Nizwa Hotel’*, and Nizwa is the cultural capital of Oman, KI-M6 (MS). Similarly, KI-10 (PVS) works for a resort that hosts weddings of international clients: *“Oman is as a wedding destination... be bought into the [concept] of the big fat Indian wedding. They booked the whole resort for the wedding and everybody talked about it”*.

5.3.3 A Selective Tourism Strategy for Lower Risk

The strongest defence against the adverse impacts of tourism was seen to be the selective, niche strategy as espoused by the MoT which is present in several excerpts (consider words in bold). As KI-G21(GO) stated *“... We aim at the **premium** segment of the tourists’ and the **special interests**’ segment, like the geologist”*. Several participants felt that the local culture and even the environment can be protected through a selective tourism strategy that targets tourist segments who will have the least impact on environment and culture. As KI-M13 (PFI) noted:

*“...our culture is reserved; you **do not need to open tourism** at once for everything, but you need to be **selective** of the type of tourism that is **safe, beneficial** for the country, and for the economy”*.

Similarly, KI-D37 (GO) observed *“... but **do we want to open** tourism for everyone and then have damage to our culture? So, we need to have **selective** tourism”*. This argument for niche tourism was very familiar to almost all participants as it has been publicised by the MoT for several years to allay fears of a mass influx of tourists. This was evident in the following discourse of KI-M21 (GO), a government respondent, who equates niche segments with better chances of preserving the environment and culture which is a high priority (consider the emphasis of words in bold):

*“First thing we know is that we will **promote our environment and our culture**. So, if we lose them, we will become artificial like other countries, which we do not want. We should*

*aim at the **premium segment** of tourists' and those **with special interests**', such as geologists. These segments will have a **less negative impact** on the culture and the environment and have **more spending capacity**".*

As KI-M9 (TA) expressed it, tourism *"could negatively affect culture and values. That is why Oman decided very early that we **do not want** back-packers meaning the tourists who have everything in their backpacks and sleep anywhere. This is **not accepted**".* The words in bold show that Oman's strategy of niche or selective tourism had been decided quite early and that mass tourist segments or those who travel on very low budgets who will intrude on and harm the Omani culture and values will not be encouraged.

KI-M10 (PVS) noted that "If you want to open tourism then the schools, and the curriculums should make the new generation aware". Similarly, KI-M23 (TA) emphasised:

*"I am seeing Oman as a tourism destination that is **not suitable for mass tourism**. Oman is **a niche market destination**, the Ministry of Tourism decides the priority for what type of tourism to promote, whether it is cultural tourism, business tourism, or natural tourism".*

KI-M17, a SME owner was quite emphatic that: *"In Oman **you do not want** tourism to be for people who will damage the country, we should **be selective**. When tourism is fully opened there will be negative impact on society and on our culture".*

Despite the agreement by many stakeholders on the selective tourism strategy which focuses on niche segments, it is not clear how much of their endorsement is the result of the constant emphasis by the MoT and the media on the merits of niche tourism. When non-governmental stakeholders referred to the selective niche strategy, they used expressions such as 'you do not want tourism', 'you do not open tourism', 'you need to be selective'. They did not use 'we' so they excluded themselves from the argument when describing how tourism should be developed. However, the governmental stakeholders referred to the niche tourism strategy using 'we know', 'we will promote', 'we should aim'. This indicates their belief or ownership of the selective tourism strategy and that they see it as a convincing argument that can influence the public and other stakeholders that tourism poses little risk for the environment or local culture.

On the other hand, a few tourism business stakeholders, both from the private sector and government owned companies, were not fans of the niche tourism strategy as they felt it was

not in line with the actual market realities. Consider the use of comparative words (in bold) in the following excerpts. As pointed out by KI-M12 (PVS), tourist packages for Oman are not competitive due to the high process charged by local carriers for niche clients:

*“Other areas and destinations are able to do better packages because the flights are cheaper. And that’s what attracts tourists to their locations. And Oman Air prices tend to be **more expensive** and that is because we have a well-established market from India that is already there, but we are not thinking of the broader context. The perception is that Oman Air is **more expensive** and that means the packages are **more expensive**. People think they want sunshine and beaches, but the travel agent can offer Qatar, Bahrain, the UAE, Jordan and Oman. And usually, the packages for Oman are always slightly **more** [expensive] than **other destinations** and one of the factors is the airfare prices”.*

Similar sentiments were expressed by other tourism business stakeholders who stressed that the prices charged by the Omani tourism sector were too high compared to what tourists are willing to pay. For example, a small company owner KI-M17 (SME) said that:

*“We have 3,200 km of beaches. Today we have the **most expensive** hotel rooms. We are a country that does not need any more 5-star hotels. We need 3-star hotels with competitive prices so that we can compete internationally.”.*

Similarly, a stakeholder from a semi government company KI-19 (SGC) noted:

*“... in order for you to see the colour of his [tourist’s] money, you have to sell him something. What are you offering him? You have handcrafts but they are **very expensive**. In order for me to buy a pen made by hand, it is **so expensive**; also, they are not available everywhere”.*

As noted by KI-M8 (GO) a senior MoT official, *“We notice that most of the local investment which comes from the local people are directed towards the lower classification of 1-to-2-star hotels”.* This indicates that the local investors are not ready to invest in bigger or luxury tourism products that the government’s niche strategy required. This may imply that local investors are not convinced of the financial feasibility of niche tourism projects.

These differing views between mass and niche tourism strategies represent a discourse conflicted between demand and supply. On the one hand stakeholders favouring niche

tourism are focused on the supply side or what Oman wants to offer. They also consider Oman's tourism attractions i.e., '*the environment and culture*' to be fragile and therefore needing to be marketed to those who can delicately utilise or enjoy these attractions. Hence their choice of expressions such as "*we need to be selective of the type of tourism*", and '*people do not want tourism that affects the culture and values*'. They also assume that Oman has a lot to offer these niche targets. The supporters of niche tourism mostly represent stakeholders who do not invest directly (or personally) in the tourism sector (unlike the private sector) or interact with the tourists themselves (unlike many tourism businesses). Hence it is worth considering if their views reflect the actual practicalities and realities of the tourism market.

Participants who advocate for mass tourism do not necessarily disagree with the inherent risks to tourism attractions, their focus is on the competitive realities of the tourism sector which affect the demand for the Omani tourism product. Their argument is that the demand for niche tourism is not large enough to generate sufficient revenue, either for themselves or the country, as the tourism market is highly competitive. The emphasis in their discourse is that Oman should be able to '*compete internationally*'.

5.3.4 Security Concerns

A third category of risk identified by some participants was the security risks associated with opening up for tourism. The following excerpts indicate that participants perceive that security concerns in relation to tourism activities are valid and should be dealt with effectively and pre-emptively.

For instance, KI-D26 (GO) stated that security concerns were very real, particularly in Dhofar. "*The worry is that some tourists could come to Oman under the umbrella of tourism but are actually coming for other purposes*". KI-M8 (GO) noted: "*Some come to Oman to beg, to deal drugs, and to rob, but they all come as tourists. But we work with the security forces and we are aware together of the situation*".

KI-M1 (PVS) highlighted the issue of theft of archaeological items by tourists which he had witnessed himself:

"some people steal precious archaeological items from the Empty Quarter. I have seen some researchers who enter Oman as tourists, but they are not actually tourist they come to

discover and steal things.... We need to create awareness among tour guides so that such things are not damaged, and tourists do not steal anything from the country”.

Other security concerns were related to the safety of the tourists themselves. For example, KI-M10 (PVS) said: *“We do not want to see something happening like what happened recently in London. Why do people come to Oman? It is because of the security that we have. So, our concern is security”.*

Participants expected the government to take a stronger role in security controls. KI-M6 (MS) said, *“I have no worries if we can control security. The security is the most important. We should have strong security”.* This was echoed by KI-M10 (PVS): *“you need regulations from the government”.* KI-M3 (LCM) said:

“security is a very important issue, Yes, Oman is a safe country under His Majesty’s Governance, but a project like The Wave [an integrated tourism complex]in Muscat I do not think the police have the authority to go inside”.

In contrast, some participants criticised Oman’s security policies for exaggerating the safety threats posed by tourists. For example, KI-D35 (PVS), claimed *“in the bars we have no problems from tourists, maybe from 1,000 tourists you have one who is not behaving well”.* Authorities were also criticised for making security decisions on tourism projects far too late. KI-D37 (GO), a government official himself, criticised situations where decisions were made to go ahead with the projects but were later cancelled just before their implementation because of security concerns:

“In any country there is security worry, but you cannot make your plans and studies and after all the work you did, you stop the development for security reasons...those who are involved should give their opinion before we start”.

KI-D33, an entrepreneur, claimed that exaggerated security concerns were slowing down approvals of visa applications: *“The officials should ease the process. I have requested a visa for an expat worker, and it is now after 6 months we could not finish the process”.* Similar sentiments on the process becoming bureaucratic due to security-related restrictions, was expressed by KI-M2 (PVS) who said:

“in one hand you say that you want to open tourism and on the other hand you are putting restriction on visas. So, you cannot have so many caps for law-and-order and security. That check from the police for sure must be there but not at the account of the genuine interest of tourism or because some people are coming from a particular nationality”.

In summary, the discourse on security concerns about tourism reveals that while the general view is that there are appropriate national level controls to address security concerns. However, the discourse also indicates power differentials and weaknesses in planning and communication within the country, at tourism sites and destinations, which may present potential security risks that negatively affect the sector. Organisations responsible for security have power over other stakeholders and over tourism activities, and they can ‘*cancel projects at the last moment*’; and ‘*delay tourism work visas*’. This power may be exercised poorly by controlling legitimate tourism activities instead of taking steps to improve security processes and enhance security standards as implied by expressions such as security officials ‘*should ease the process*’ and ‘*should give their opinion before*’.

5.4 Perception of Tourism Planning in Oman

Most participants were very positive about the various natural resources and attractions that Oman has to ensure a vibrant tourism sector. These were often expressed in sentiments such as, Oman... “*has a huge potential for tourism*”, or “*is a beautiful country*”, or “*has different natural attractions*” References were also made to the local people and culture as important tourism assets. These views were explicitly expressed by KI-M12 (PVS):

“Oman has huge potential for tourism. In the past there was no planning for utilising the tourism resources. Oman is a rich country that has a great history, old civilisation, Omani citizens who add a lot to the tourism, the geography, and climate diversity”.

Another private sector stakeholder (KI-M17) noted that:

“Oman has a combination of attractions that you cannot find in any other country in the world. It is the only country in the world that combines security, generous people, appreciation, respect, land, sea, desert, mountains, history, cleanliness, culture, values, and behaviour”.

However, despite the abundance of natural resources, participants expressed concerns about the lack of planning in utilising these assets effectively in order to achieve the desired benefits from tourism. Analysis of stakeholders' discourse reveals five major flaws in the governments' system of tourism planning which are perceived by respondents. The words in bold in the excerpts presented in the five sections below highlight participants' perceptions of these flaws, including, lack of direction and approach to planning and development and express their wish to address these weaknesses.

5.4.1 Lack of Clear Direction

The view that tourism planning in Oman lacked direction was expressed by many stakeholders. Specifically, they believed that the government did not have a clear vision of the objectives to be pursued and how the tourism sector should be developed in coordination with other sectors. In the excerpts below, public sector employees repeatedly use negative words such as '*may not*', '*will not*', '*there is no*' in relation to the tourism planning and development which is referred to by words such i.e., '*future*', '*direction*', '*ahead*', '*planning*'. This indicates their acknowledgement of the lack of direction in tourism planning. Respondents also use modal words such as, '*must*' '*should*', to emphasise what should be done to ensure better results for the tourism sector. Such expressions are repeated or recur throughout the discourse on planning, (consider bolded words).

KI-24 (GO) from the government emphasised the lack of clear direction and coordination in the following statements:

*"From my view, until today **there is no direction** for tourism in Oman.....All this plan **may not** be achieved at all because you are part of a **whole system** which **must** move to the same **direction** or it **will not** succeed".*

KI-20 (GO), another government official, described meetings they have with the MoT thus *"These [meetings] are to give us information about the **future direction** of the Ministry Tourism, but we **do not** get information or data about the future tourism areas".*

Strong sentiments about the lack of planning can be noted repeatedly in the discourse. KI-22 (GO) who noted that, *"We have so many places [sites], but we **need proper planning** to reach the aim".* Other participants such as KI-12 (PVS), a businessman noted the weakness in planning thus: *"I think for the future of tourism industry, we really need to be **planning***

ahead". KI-M19 (SGCS) said that because of lack of planning, tourism in Oman cannot even be categorised as an industry yet:

*"To have a sustainable tourism industry, and I say here industry, you need to have proper **planning**. For the past few years, Oman was having some tourism, but it **was not recognised**. Even now we **cannot** say it is an industry by itself, an industry that adds to...and can be accredited for a **proper GDP** contribution to the country. The fact that there were some tourists coming to Oman and staying for a couple of nights and then leaving. I **would not** call that an industry. Honestly speaking, professionally speaking and academically speaking, I **will not** call it a tourism industry. It is some tourists who come and go. That's it. **It is not an** industry. When you... talk about a tourism industry then you are talking about...a different level of industry, a **more** professional level, **more** statistics, **more** accountability, an accounted for industry".*

The above excerpts refer to missing elements, i.e., the lack of '*proper planning*', '*proper GDP contribution*'; and the need for '*more professionalism*', '*more statistical data*', '*more accountability*' as reasons why tourism in Oman cannot be called an industry. Similar views were expressed by other participants who stated that in the absence of clear direction and therefore planning, the tourism industry had grown haphazardly - i.e., not driven rationally by a governmental plan, but serendipitously or organically by itself. As noted by KI-M6 (MS), despite all the rhetoric on the importance of tourism to the economy, not much progress has been made:

*"Some people see these decisions [plans] as **discouraging** because they **have not** made a big jump. Now we are in the year 2017, talking about the contribution of tourism in the GDP and it **has not even** reached 2%".*

The excerpt above presents a range of negative attributes to government plans: '*discouraging*', '*have not made a big jump*', '*contribution not reaching 2%*'.

Similar negative discourse is evident in this statement from KI-M8 (GO) in relation to the economic returns from tourism "*If we compare [ourselves] with the other big tourism countries, the return for us is relatively small. So, we need to raise the financial return to Oman*". KI-M8 (GO) uses comparison with '*other big tourism countries*' to bring out the fact that returns from tourism are small in Oman.

Most of the above excerpts directly link the lack of adequate economic returns from tourism to the lack of direction and planning. KI-M8 (GO) of the MoT sees the problem as a lack of vision: *“The vision is not clear to us”*. This was expressed in another way by KI-D28 (GO), on being asked what the main challenges for tourism planning in Oman are, *“I will repeat again that **we must foresee the future**”*. This response implies that anticipating the future is a key responsibility of government not been done currently or if it is, it is not done well. Anticipating the future and creating strategies and plans to manage the future is the key reason for, as well as an outcome of planning. There was some attempt to defend the efforts of the MoT. For instance, KI-M8 (GO) of the MoT pointed out that the sector, including the private sector, is still new to tourism and lacks the necessary experience: *“The first challenge is that we are a new sector. We do not have experience, we lack the experience, and the private sector lacks the experience”*. In this discourse, KI-M8 (GO) attempts to deflect blame solely from the government by referring to the lack of experience of the tourism sector itself and to the private sector more generally. He does this by not explicitly mentioning either the government or the MoT but by implying a collective identity or association with the “sector”.

MoT defenders also referred to OTS 2040 as evidence of moving in the right direction with regards to vision and planning for the future. OTS 2040 is seen as an achievement for the Ministry although it was prepared in the main part by a consultancy firm THR and not the MoT itself. Section 5.9 presents further findings in relation to participants’ perspectives on OTS 2040.

5.4.2 Lack of Adequate Government Expertise

Many non-government stakeholders directly attributed the lack of direction and weaknesses in planning to the lack of expertise of government officials (by implication the MoT). According to KI-M6 (MS), government officials made decisions arbitrarily, according to their own whims rather than on the basis of a sound, clear plan: *“we have a problem with the system... At the end it is the mood of the government and the officials”*. KI-M16 (TA) was very critical of MoT officials for lacking commitment to their responsibilities as can be seen in the repeated negative emphasis (in bold) in relation to their work:

*“The MoT employs people who when they go to their offices **do not** think of any new thing and they **just** care to finish the number of working hours. They **do not** work hard and think how to develop tourism, and that is why I feel tourism in Oman **is not** good”*.

KI-M6 (MS) went further in his response below. He believed that government officials should be replaced, “*there must be new blood*”, as they are not doing what was intended by His Majesty the Sultan, who is portrayed as the “*best person who makes plans in Oman*”.

“I think that there must be new blood that looks towards the future. The best person who makes plans in Oman is His Majesty. He makes real plans, and if these plans had been implemented here in Oman then we would have been in advanced stages. But His Majesty trusts the government and the officials. They work hard, and he believes that what they do is the right thing”.

KI-M6 (MS)’s use of modality in ‘must be new blood’ and by qualifying His Majesty’s plans as ‘real’ plans which if they ‘had been implemented’, reveals his low assessment of government officials in terms of planning and implementation expertise. His discourse implies that government officials lack the ability and commitment to look ahead and plan for the future, unlike the Sultan. The contrast here is with the late Sultan Qaboos’s proven ability to lead Oman’s rapid development especially in the first three decades of his reign. KI-M6 implies that the plans were not executed or implemented as they should have been by government officials. Moreover, he also raises issues of accountability in performance by indicating that the Sultan trusts government officials to do the right thing, but they do not. These views of the lack of expertise among government officials in planning was echoed and emphasised by KI-M4 (PVS) who uses modality (in bold) to emphasise expertise. He says the solution is to put the right person in the right place:

*“People who are responsible for tourism planning **must be** efficient and expert...In addition, they **must have** experience for at least six to 10 years...We can overcome these challenges by replacing some people who are responsible for tourism planning and by asking competent people to do the planning. Put the right person in the right place and then we can have good plans, which are discussed with the different stakeholders”.*

It can be inferred that this emphasis on expertise and competent people is due to the current lack or weaknesses in planning, as once there are ‘good plans’, they can be ‘discussed with the different stakeholders’.

In order to fill this void of lack expertise, the MoT uses international experts and consultants. The government currently employs many foreign experts, but respondents expressed different points of view regarding the use of international expertise. One point of view was

that while government bodies would benefit from international expertise, unfortunately such expertise is not used effectively. According to KI-D28 (GO) who does not work for the MoT, but for another related Ministry:

“We don’t benefit much from the expertise that we get from abroad ...we do not give them much chance to give us good things and that is because when the experts come, we try to make them go in our direction rather than we learn from them. And these experts do not want to lose their jobs, so they work with what we want, and we do not benefit from them”.

In using the collective pronoun, ‘we’, KI-D28 (GO) is referring to government ministries and organisations in general, as many of them have experts or consultants to advise them. The above excerpt also reveals that while experts are employed or brought in, their expert power may be rendered useless, (*we do not give them much chance to give us*), as to a large extent the MoT controls their output (*try to make them go in our direction*). Hence the government with its own lack of expertise, nullifies the ability of the experts by not allowing them to use their expertise without hindrance and control.

Another non-tourism example of this kind of control of experts was given by KI-D28 (GO)

“For example, we bring a football coach and pay him millions and when he selects players for the national team the people in the admin says that these are not good players, so if you know who the good players are, why do you get a coach and pay him millions?... This thing happens not only in football but also in the ministries”.

The need for international expertise was emphasised by KI-D26 (GO), “We **should** benefit from other country’s experience. We **need** successful cases and to implement them in Oman in the same way”. Similarly, KI-M19 (SGCS) felt that it would be best to have external experts deciding tourism planning issues “If you want practical answers, get a professional company to drive and set up the tourism strategy and then have [opinion] polls to implement it”.

Such statements refer to experts positively by using expressions such as ‘successful’; ‘benefits’; ‘practical and professional’. However, other stakeholders argued against bringing international experts in, as they lacked knowledge of local issues. KI-M24, (GO), noted that such experts may meet with some of the Omani stakeholders, but not with local communities:

*“We do not do our strategies by ourselves. We hire experts and experts are asked to assess the current situation, which means that they **should** meet with the existing stakeholders. So, experts are asked to sit with all of them and to see what the country has in terms of products. But I do not recall that experts had also met with the local community”.*

KI-M23 (TA) was the harshest critic of international consultants and companies:

“Who creates the development plans? We are getting companies from Spain, from Singapore and from the USA, these are ready-made plans, they just copy and paste plans without understanding the local community and the local issues in tourism or what is called localisation”.

The real issue seems to be the way experts carry out their work i.e., ‘*without understanding the local community and the local issues*’. However, while this is an issue, a key factor which has been already highlighted, could be that the government’s ill-advised control over experts prevents them from gaining adequate understanding of the local contexts.

Stakeholder discourse reveals that while the MoT’s lack of expertise in planning effectively is quite clearly acknowledged, there is less consensus on how to address the weakness. While some favour the replacement of less competent government officials by more competent ones, others felt that the lack should be addressed by using external or international expertise. Government representatives themselves indicated they do not gain much value from the experts as the input and contribution of these experts are mostly controlled by the government bodies, to their detriment. Moreover, some stakeholders argued that that international experts lacked knowledge of local issues and failed to consult with all stakeholders particularly, the local communities, thereby resulting in plans that are not contextualised effectively.

5.4.3 Fragmented Decision-making

Another major flaw in Oman’s tourism planning system revealed by the discourse analysis is the fragmented nature of the decision-making process. Several interviews stated that the tourism planning decision-making system was fractured and dysfunctional. Reasons attributed for this were the many different government organisations involved in tourism related decisions and the lack of coordination between them. The use of modal words (in bold) by the different participants indicates what should be fixed in the decision-making process: ‘*MoT does not give*’, ‘*does not have*’, ‘*it should be*’.

As noted by KI-D30 (MCM) “*There are many things that the **MoT does not** give the final approvals for...For example, there are things with the Supreme Council of Planning, with the Ministry of Finance, and with the other ministries*”.

Several ‘*other ministries*’ are indicated in the excerpt above in relation to tourism related activities. KI-M20 (GO) stated: “*The Ministry of Housing gives land to investors in areas that **should not be** given for investment...*”. Similarly, KI-M20 (GO) noted, “*There **should be** continuous communication about the tourism areas between the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Housing*”. These statements refer to specific government stakeholders such as various ministries and the Supreme Council of Planning which are involved in decisions that affect tourism activities.

Some participants were of the view that the MoT does not have sufficient authority over the tourism planning process, and this results in scattered responsibility for deciding issues such as land protection, conflicts in coastal areas, approvals for tourism businesses and inadequate infrastructural provision for tourism projects. Power struggle between the different government organisations is an issue resulting in bureaucracy and long delays in government procedures. Power struggle is presented in words such as ‘*authority*’, ‘*many captains for the same ship*’, ‘*grab*’, ‘*only*’, ‘*sole*’ are emphasised using modal words in the following excerpts (consider words in bold). As noted by KI-D28 (GO) “*The MoT **does not** have the **authority***”, and KID-D30 (MCM): “*the Minister of Tourism is willing, but **he needs more authority***”.

To deal with these problems, several stakeholders favoured giving more authority to the MoT. Both KI-D30 (MCM) and KI-D36 (SME), when asked about who should be responsible for tourism planning in Oman said, “*It **should be the MoT***”. KI-M19 (SGCS) emphasised it thus:

*“It **has to be the Ministry of Tourism**. Here, the problem in Oman is that there are so many captains for the same ship... The Ministry of Tourism **has to grab complete direction and be the only, sole, initiator, and legislator**”.*

Similar views were expressed by others such as KI-M13 (PFI) “*In my opinion it **should be the MoT** because it has the tools, the resources, the vision and it is closer to tourism because it is their specialisation*”, and KI-D31 (SME), “*All types of tourism whether they are*

*adventure tourism, or tour guides or diving or whatever **should only** be licensed by the MoT”.*

KI-D37 (GO), a government official, noted that there is already a directorate at the MoT designed solely for planning purposes: *“The MoT has a directorate general for planning. So, the hierarchy of the planning in the tourism sector is available”*. However, the top-down hierarchical system of decision-making within the MoT is very rigid even on minor issues. Consider the below excerpt from KI-M6 (MS) where he emphasises the constraints in decision-making:

*“The Undersecretary **cannot** make decisions without going back to the Minister, and the Director General **cannot** make decisions without going back to the Undersecretary, and so on. For example, some officials from the MoT came to me and wanted me to add a page in my magazine for the children, which is a small thing. We gave them a good proposal which they liked. But they said that they **needed to** get the approval of the Director General, the Director General **needed** to get the Undersecretary’s approval and the Undersecretary **needed** the Minister’s approval”*.

Decision-making power must be reflected in the requirements at each stage to lead to successful execution. The lack of clarity in the role and decision-making power of the MoT in planning and implementation, can be seen in the following statements of two government representatives, who felt that the MoT’s role should be to decide the direction of tourism and to regulate the sector, but not to implement tourism projects. KI-M24 (GO) *“It **should only** decide the main direction and vision of the country, provide resources and coordinate with other organisations”*. This view was echoed by KI-M8 (GO):

*“The Ministry of Tourism **should be just** concerned with organising the sector, making strategies and master plans while implementation and development **should be** between the Omran Company and the private sector...The Ministry budget was allocated for this role”*.

However, there appears to be a higher source of power and fragmentation in planning decisions in the form of the Supreme Planning Committee (SCP). For some interviewees, the SCP is the ultimate authority for all planning decisions. When reviewing their discourse (below), it is worth considering whether these participants are merely reflecting their understanding of the current status quo and political power structure or whether they are convinced that the SCP is the best entity to plan for all sectors of the economy including

tourism. KI-D37 (GO) “It is known that planning is the responsibility of the SCP – it is its role to plan for the macro-economy in Oman” [including tourism planning]. According to KI-M9 (TA):

“In Oman it is the Supreme Council of Planning [which is ultimately responsible for tourism planning]. The MoT should be responsible for sending the plans to either the Supreme Council of Planning or to the Cabinet for approval”.

KI-M14 (TA) reinforced this view when asked who should be ultimately responsible for tourism planning:

*“I think it **should not** be at the Ministry level. It **should be** higher than that. **At least** at the **Supreme Council level**. Because tourism is so integrated with other sectors, you cannot develop tourism without developing, for example, transportation, airports, hotels, hospitals and all of these, therefore it cannot be at a Ministry level ...First of all you need all of them to make an informed decision. But the Supreme Council of Planning **should** make the final decision”.*

This view that the SCP must lead tourism planning, and the Ministries function at a lower level such as the implementation of those plans was echoed by several participants, notably from the government, elected representatives and some academics. Consider the contrasting verbs used (in bold) in the following sentences:

KI-M11 (GO): “The SCP should **plan**, while the MoT should be an **execution** organisation”.

KI-D28 (GO): “The SCP should **make the plans**, and the MoT should be **implementing**”.

KI-M3 (LCM) “The MoT is the one that **implement and develops** the regulations and protects the interests of all stakeholders. There should be specialised companies to plan for any project. These companies should be **appointed** by the SCP”.

However, other participants disagreed that the SCP was the ultimate planning body. KI-M11 (GO) saw the SCP’s role as coordination:

*“The system is good...the SCP is concerned with all the sectors, the infrastructure. So, the SCP **integrates** the MoT **plan** with other sector plans such as water, electricity, roads and municipal services”.*

KI-D28 (GO) emphasised that the power wielded by the SCP should be used for collaborating and joint decision-making: *“There is the SCP which **should plan in collaboration** with other government organisations”*. KI-D37 (GO) and KI-24 (GO), both government representatives themselves, were possibly more pragmatic in their views of the roles of the different bodies whilst acknowledging the bigger macro role played by the SCP. According to KI-24 (GO): The SCP *“...should **only decide** the main direction and vision of the country”*. KI-D37 (GO) saw the SCP’s role as allocation of resources rather than planning:

“There is no doubt that the SCP is the bigger umbrella for the economic planning as a whole in the country... the SCP should provide the resources while the MoT should be responsible for the planning”.

The following statement by KI-M24 (GO) of the MoT implies that the international consultants who prepared OTS 2040 were aware that there were at least systemic problems in Oman tourism planning and implementation process:

*“I remember that Spanish company team when they set up the last strategy said that all these plans may not be achieved at all because you are part of a whole system which **must** move to the same direction or it **will not** succeed”*.

The impact of fragmented decision making by multiple organisational bodies is especially evident in the planning and implementation of coastal/marine tourism projects, over which authority is contested. For example, many coastal tourism activities are not licensed by MoT but by MoE which has a department that overlooks coastal activities, and these stakeholders emphasise their own role by repeatedly using “we and us”. According to KI-M22 (GO): *“We have a department responsible for assessing sea activities”*. KI-M20 (GO) further elaborated: *“All the tourism activities in the sea such as water bikes, kayaks, and tour boats get licenses from us”*. Municipalities also have a role in issuing licenses to ensure beaches are protected as asserted by KI-D26 (GO), *“We issue municipal licenses for companies or hotels on the coast, and we protect beaches from damage”*.

The use of ‘we’ and ‘us’ by the interviewees to refer to their own organisation’s role also reveals how each stakeholder’s role is separate from the others. It also indicates a duplication of effort by various government organisations resulting in fragmented decision-making. These problems were highlighted by many respondents who criticised the government for

failing to integrate its policies on tourism. As noted by KI-M14 (TA) an academic, said *“There is **no cooperation** between **any** of the stakeholders, and they are more or less working on the same thing but **not working together**. It is a **wasted effort**”*.

Such views were reiterated by the private sector and SME stakeholders who noted that they bore the brunt of the burden caused by weak communication and coordination by the government. For example, KI- D31(SME) expressed his frustration with the problems that the lack of communication and coordination between government bodies, created for businesses:

“There should be a table [a stakeholder participation platform] for all of the ministries to come up with one paper where you do not wait for the approval of each ministry separately and are worried of making decisions. The RoP gives you a conditional approval to get the other ministries approval as well without mentioning which other ministries they mean, so you may be going to all the ministries and you have no clue where to go, you will need around three to four months to identify which ministry they mean because they do not name them.”

Similarly, K-12 (PVS) noted:

“they need to be coordinated very well at the government level. And I think the MoT must be involved in a very close communication with other government bodies.... it has to be very well coordinated, to be very well communicated between departments and to say this is what we are going to do, and this is how we are going to achieve it”.

The repeated use of negative words in stakeholder discourse to describe the weaknesses and gaps, ‘no cooperation’, ‘not working together’, ‘wasted effort’, ‘separately’, ‘worried’, ‘no clue’. indicates a level of frustration among non-governmental stakeholders with the process. Moreover, the use of ‘all’, ‘other’, ‘they’, ‘them’ by the participants reveal how these stakeholders see decision-making as a process in which they have no control as they are not included, nor do they participate. The process is fragmented and is also not an inclusive or collaborative one and yet non-governmental stakeholders bear the consequences. Such consequences are borne not just by the private sector and SMEs but also by the public and local communities as seen in further discourse below.

The failure to integrate policies affecting tourism and the resulting negative consequences were particularly evident in coastal areas, where there was no zoning system. KI-M11 (GO) noted: *“Most of the investors want to invest on beaches. Projects built on the beaches often caused coastal erosion”*. KI-M3 noted that poor planning resulted in insufficient space to provide fishing ports for the local fishermen:

“Unfortunately, the space between the projects and the sea is zero: if they had left about 40 or 50 meters between the sea and these projects it would have been good at least to build small fishing ports”.

Such poor planning leads to tension between tourism businesses and fishermen as confirmed by KI-D31 (SME) based on his own experience in his locality:

“Yes, it happened [conflict] many times. It happened with two foreign companies, one a fishing company and the other a diving company. They always go where local fishermen fish, so the local people complained about them, but the MoT and the Coastal Guard did not interfere, and there are no fishing zones that are decided by law. Local people got very upset about it, but they could not do anything”.

The challenges presented in the above excerpts reveal that coastal tourism activities do result in conflict between local people and business organisations. Moreover, the government apparently maintains a more supportive position towards business organisations rather than the locals as indicated by the words: *‘MoT... **did not interfere**’*, and that the local community was powerless in this respect as *‘locals **could not do anything**’*.

Another private sector stakeholder KI-D29 (PVS) reported incidents between businesses and local people. What is revealing about the discourse (below) is the acknowledgement by the private sector stakeholder that the locals are the original owners of the land from which historically they gained their livelihood, but after the land was used by the government for tourism development projects, they do not share in any of the resulting benefits; rather their way of life was disrupted:

“In one of the meetings with the government here in the region, one of the hotel’s general managers brought to the table that he is facing a daily challenge with the local people. All the local people are the owners of the place, and this is their land. Now as an international hotel company or as an investor you came here say five or 10 years ago and you bought

*that place and build a hotel that is fine. However, looking at the history, that place **used to be** for the fishermen. They **used to gain** their bread there”.*

The above excerpts with the emphasis on ‘**used to**’ as in ‘**used to be** for the fishermen, ‘**they used to gain their bread there**’, indicates a historical discourse that was present here from the past, it reveals the power change in land use from local people to business organisations.

A few of the participants noted that there should be a coastal zoning system to deal with the conflict between the different stakeholders as stated by KI-M20 (GO): “*The government **should have** something called the coastal zone management system”*. KI-M17 (SME) also emphasised this point thus:

“You [the government] should decide the areas on the coast. You cannot build projects in an area that is full of fishermen: this way you make people feel angry. The coast is open, and we have 3,200 km of beaches”.

These aspects were also reinforced by KI-D29 (PVS):

“.. as long as we do not organise where the fishermen can fish, where they can dock and pass, and where the guests and tourists can stay, this will always remain a challenge. I think we have to look at that and we have to limit the zones: a zone for fishing, a zone for water sports, and a zone for relaxing..... to ensure that the big ships do not go close to simple fishermen’s boats, who depend on fishing for their living”.

Coastal and marine areas offer vital resources for Oman tourism sector; however, as can be seen from the discourse, the fragmented and inefficient decision-making processes has created problems for the stakeholders involved. Most of the stakeholder groups are aware of the problems that have resulted from the fragmented decision-making process and they suggest a more collaborative platform to address this.

5.4.4 Slow Implementation of Decisions and Tourism Projects

Several representatives of tourism businesses criticised the slow pace of tourism projects in Oman, as the words in bold in the following excerpts show). KI-M1 (PVS) commented on tourism planning decisions that “*They are **very slow**”*. KI-M2 (PVS) said: “*The **first challenge** that we have is the **lack of quick** decision-making processes”*.”

Likewise, KI-M2 (PVS) emphasised that, “*We need to work **fast**, what is happening sometimes is that we have a lot of meetings and talk a lot, but at the end the **actions are not happening**”*. Similar views about the length of time taken were expressed by government representatives who emphasised the long delays in approvals and implementation. As KI-M7 (GO) noted, one of the most important challenges in tourism development in Oman is “*getting licenses from government organisations in a **short time**”*. Similarly, KI-M7 (GO) stated: “*The negative part in Oman is that the implementation of projects is **very slow**”*. KI-M9 (TA) felt that the issue was not with planning but with implementation “*So, in general we have no problems with planning, but we have problems of implementation. I will again go back to planning and I say it is good, but the implementation of these decisions is bad*”.

Realising the slow progress made in achieving the national economic objectives, the Omani government created TANFEEDH in 2016 to accelerate the implementation of government projects. KI-M21 (GO) explained that “*TANFEEDH means speeding*”. It was set up as a General Public Authority to review all government projects in all the main economic sectors of the country, including tourism, in order to quicken their implementation. Several participants referred to TANFEED as a mechanism to expedite approvals from the MoE and MoH. As KI-M21 (GO) said, “*TANFEED has solved some of these problems, some of the projects need environmental approval some do not need much*”. KI-M21 (GO), noting that land approval for tourism projects and businesses usually takes “*a couple of months*” by the Ministry of Housing, reported that “*But now with TANFEED we think it is going to take a matter of days only*”. Note that the choice of words indicates that this is just a sentiment, as it is yet to happen.

However, a question that needs to be answered is how participative has TANFEED been? As TANFEED was established as a tool to mediate between stakeholders and bring them together to speed up project implementation, stakeholder participation lies at the heart of the TANFEED initiative. The only way that projects can be implemented more quickly is to engage with stakeholders more vigorously and effectively. KI-M9 (TA), on being asked whether there are stakeholders who were not included in the TANFEED discussions, responded thus “*No, I think all are participating. Especially in the recent period when making the strategy and with TANFEED, everybody is participating*”. Commenting on stakeholder participation, KI-M7 (GO) was also positive: “*TANFEED is making it stronger. From*

TANFEED small teams came out and they are under the supervision of the MoT, and it has members from the Ministry of Housing". And KI-M19 said (Government Business):

"Look, I think the idea is fantastic. The idea has been proved it is sound [from] the Malaysian example. We went to Malaysia to understand further the laboratories and the indicators and how it works. It is a self-governing kind of initiative which is excellent".

One question that need to be considered is how participative TANFEED has been. As TANFEED was established as a tool to mediate between stakeholders and bring them together to speed up project implementation, stakeholder participation lies at the heart of the TANFEED initiative. The only way that projects can be implemented more quickly, is to engage with stakeholders more vigorously and effectively. KI-M9 (TA), on being asked whether there are stakeholders who were not included in the TANFEED discussions, responded thus *"No, I think all are participating. Especially in the recent period when making the strategy and with TANFEED, everybody is participating"*. Commenting on stakeholder participation, KI-M7 (GO) was also positive: *"TANFEED is making it stronger. From TANFEED small teams came out and they are under the supervision of the MoT, and it has members from the Ministry of Housing"*.

TANFEED is seen by some as a vehicle for more stakeholder participation. Most notably, the discourse of tourism business stakeholders, especially the private sector stakeholders, is very positive as can be seen from their use of expressions such as *'most important steps'*, *'making it stronger'*, *'very well done'*, *'was integral'*, *'excellent event'*, *'wonderful opportunity'* (see the excerpts below). The level of positivity is evidently linked to the fact that respondents or their organisations were included in the participative process.

According to KI-M10 (PVS): *"TANFEED is one of the **most important steps** towards participation"*. KI-M12 (PVS), in commenting on which tourism stakeholders are included by TANFEED, mentions only *'key partners'*:

*We had [stakeholders] from the tourism industry, e.g., we had representatives from the 5-star hotels, and we had some tour operators, I think it was Sahara [a company] and some other **key partners** which **drive** business into the country"*.

And when he was asked if there are any stakeholders excluded from the TANFEED process who should have been included, KI-M12 (PVS) responded once again that key stakeholders were included while remaining silent as to who were not included:

*“I think from what I understand, TANFEED was organised by the MoT, and that was **very well done**. And I think it was a great opportunity because there was participation from every level, from the Ministry and from **key people** in the business sector”.*

Other private sector stakeholders also confirmed their participation in TANFEED. For example, KI-M10 (PVS) said, “Yes, we had our Director of HR participating in TANFEED”. KI-M19 (SGCS) confirmed that, “We participated as a company in the TANFEED programme. Our participation was **integral**”. KI-M12 (PVS) also was very positive about the opportunity provided by TANFEEDH to participate particularly because it brought together people with diverse or different views:

*“TANFEED... was an **excellent event** because it brought together people from different businesses in Muscat. It was a **wonderful** opportunity to be able to share our opinions and thoughts... it is very important to think of the opinions of other people from outside your own box because they will think and look at things different to you and they may have something different which you may not have seen, not because you cannot see, it is just because we think in different ways and we come from different backgrounds and we see things differently”.*

The above excerpts indicate that TANFEEDH did provide an opportunity for stakeholders especially those from government bodies, tourism business and academia, to participate in discussions to address problems. Stakeholders are quite positive about the opportunity as can be seen by their choice of approbatory words. Their discourse also seems to indicate that this was one of the few times they had such a forum or opportunity.

However, some participants who praised TANFEED as an idea, were critical of the ability of the TANFEED to actually speed up project development and implementation. The excerpts presented below indicate that lack of speed and delays in reaching decisions have continued even with TANFEEDH, final approvals still lie with the Ministerial Council/Committee and not with TANFEEDH itself (consider bolded words below), which takes time. For example, as noted by KI-M7 (GO), no projects had yet come out of TANFEED, “*To be frank, we have*

*not seen results, but these teams send the recommendations to the main ministerial committees who **make the decisions***". KI-M19 (SGCS) stated:

*"I wanted to say that, when I looked at the tourism sector in TANFEED, I did not see **much difference** from what was talked about before. I think the TANFEED program is very shy. It **is not turbocharging** the sector. It is **still organic**".*

The TANFEED programme was also accused of engaging in lengthy discussions that are not practical for busy stakeholders such as the private sector. KI-M12 (PVS), when asked whether he was satisfied with his participation in TANFEED commented thus:

*"I felt maybe there was **too much** talking and **too much** going over historical issues and I think we just need to get to the point sometimes...to spend that amount of time on the subject was good, however get to your point **quickly** so that you can go to actions **quickly** and then you see change more **quickly**".*

Thus, while all comments about the process of engagement are very positive, there are reservations about the speed of decision-making and hence the actual results that can be achieved even by TANFEEDH even though it was created solely to speed up implementation in a bureaucratic system.

5.4.5 Lack of Funding for Tourism Projects

In part, the delays in project implementation were attributed to the lack of funds made available to the MoT for tourism projects. This was noted by participants from all stakeholder groups. The following statement from KI-M19 (SGCS), implies that the emphasis on tourism is merely talk as it is not followed through with adequate funding during implementation:

"If the funding is not given who should take responsibility? We said that the direction is set for tourism. We say it, but what is actually happening is not much different to organic growth...the problem comes during the implementation... .. Sometimes you know that the reasons are purely economic reasons: there is not enough budget and capital to be invested by the government and the private sector".

Similarly, KI-D30 (MCM) noted *"You cannot ask the MoT to undertake big projects and then give them small budgets. They will not be able to do anything. To be able to tackle tourism you need good budgets"*. According to KI-D32 (TA) one reason for the lack of

funding is that *“The government is focusing more on oil and gas companies”*. These statements again reveal the lack of power held by the MoT relative to other ministries or activities that compete for funding. Such funding decisions are decided at the level of the Supreme Committee of Planning and the Ministry of Finance and the MoT’s power and influence over these bodies is not strong.

Lack of funding was also said to be the reason why very little research is conducted in relation to tourism to improve results. For instance, (KI-M14) (TA) observed that there has only been limited research on coastal tourism carried out by academics through their own initiative and funds. The lack of funding was also the reason given for weaknesses in security including poor monitoring of tourism-related activities in coastal areas, where poor fishing practices undermined recreational tourism. The discourse below reveals the lack of necessary investment through words such as *‘without’, ‘take away’, ‘only spent on’* etc. KI-D33 (SME) emphasised that *“We have an open sea that is abused **without** anyone watching or observing”*. KI-D35 (SME) the owner of a sea tours company, linked this to efforts to reduce costs: *“The government did a study relating to the economic crisis and based on this. decided to **take away** the vehicles from staff who monitor such activities. So, will staff watch from their houses or what? I do not understand!”*. KI-D33 (SME) corroborated the lack of equipment and funds required for monitoring activities: *“The Ministry of Fisheries has inspectors **without** vehicles and boats. What are they doing? They are sitting in their offices”*. KI-M9 (TA) emphasised that the budgets challenges for tourism are significant as the available resources are allocated for training and human resource development for all sectors:

*“There is a lot of money available, some of the organisations have money up to OMR 200 million, but the problem that all of these are **only spent** on training. So, if even if a little of this is spent on developing tourism, it can help...for, infrastructure and ministries... as loans or grants for citizens and small investors”*.

KI-M8 (GO) said that the private sector was not ready to provide funds to invest in tourism in Oman because the tourism industry was too young and risky which negatively affect the economic feasibility of their projects: *“However, I think even the Omani Private Sector is not ready for investing in the tourism sector”*. *The reason is that it is a new sector. Investors see that the tourism sector has a lot of risk”*.

Hence while there is systemic weakness in tourism planning in Oman, there is also a lack of funding by the government and the private sector which is vital for effective implementation. Figure 6 brings together the perception of tourism stakeholder on issues and challenges related to tourism planning and directly addresses research objective one.

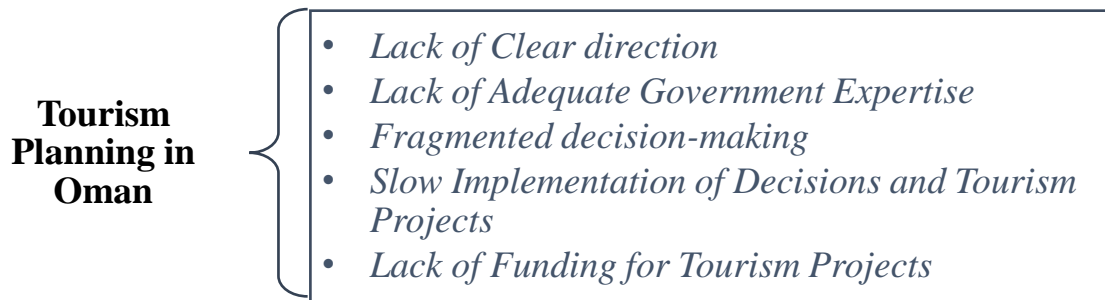


Figure 6: Stakeholder Perceptions of Tourism Planning in Oman

Summing up this section, participant responses indicate a lack of direction and planning in tourism by the government as represented by the MoT. Government decision-making is fragmented among multiple government bodies with fingers in the same pie. This creates a planning and developing system which is marked by confusion and lacks coherence. The hierarchical system and power structure create confusion among all stakeholders as to whom is really responsible for tourism planning: the MoT or the Supreme Committee for Planning. Closely related to these issues is a question mark over the ability and expertise of MoT and other government officials to carry out effective planning. There was disagreement among the interviewees about bringing in international expertise for planning purposes; supporters thought international expertise is important to develop local capabilities, while critics were of the view that international experts' lack of localised understanding and failure to consult with local communities creates further issues.

Stakeholders emphasised the importance of allocating responsibility for tourism planning to a single organisation which should be the MoT or at a level higher than MoT, in order to bring different stakeholders and resources together. They emphasised that this planning body should have the power to involve stakeholders during the direction and vision setting, planning, implementation, and operational stages. While the MoT sees the development of OTS 2040 as a significant step in the right direction by providing clear direction and plans, other stakeholders feel that planning and implementation are still not aligned to a clear vision. Even with OTS 2040, the criticisms from the participants about the lack of cooperation and

coordination between government organisations at all stages and the lack of a stakeholder participation platform remain relevant. The findings indicate that there is a lack of effective coordination between relevant government organisations which must be addressed to ensure the process is streamlined, and efficient. Finally, while the government has responded to criticisms about the slow speed of project development and implementation in Oman by initiating TANFEED to speed up decision-making and implementation, there is little evidence that TANFEED can fulfil its role. Furthermore, there are concerns about the lack of adequate funding for tourism development.

5.5 Current Stakeholder Participation in Tourism Planning

Stakeholder discourse reveals that respondents believe an inclusive and collaborative stakeholder engagement process is needed to enhance the benefits of tourism in Oman while limiting the risks or costs.

5.5.1 Selection of Stakeholders

Several participants particularly, from tourism businesses (both private and government), government investors, and academics asserted that the MoT does involve many stakeholders in their planning process. The words in bold in the excerpts below indicate how and why they think the MoT engages with different stakeholders. KI-M13 (PFI), who has a governance role in a tourism business, stated “*What I see is that the government represented by MoT is **listening**. I am sure that they **listen to any person** who has an idea or a suggestion*”. KI-D27 (PVS) said:

*“I have **met** with the officials from MoT on **several** occasions. I have attended **several seminars** with them regarding planning, improvement of tourism, what are **our views, our feedback**, and these sorts of things. I attended about four or five **workshops** and they were **all very successful**”.*

Similarly, KI-M19) (SGCS) stated “*I attended **many**. We participated as a company in TANFEED programme. We had a member from the executive committee who attended TANFEED meetings*”.

Academics such as KI-M9 (TA) also expressed their satisfaction with the level of involvement: “*Personally I am very satisfied with the meetings that **I had** participated in*”.

Similarly, KI-M9 (TA) when asked whether stakeholders were included in planning for tourism development, responded in the affirmative “Yes, **all the stakeholders are included...I think all are participating. Especially in the recent period when making the strategy and with TANFEED everybody is participating**”.

From the local community point of view, KI-D30 (MCM), confirmed that the Municipal Council has been involved in tourism planning.

*“Yes, since it started in 2013, we are concerned with coordinating and integrating different government organisations...The MoT started the approach of **involving** the concerned organisations, the local community and the citizens...the existence of the Municipal Council in each Willayat **will ease communication between citizens and the government**”.*

The above statement also indicates the involvement of the Municipal Council was more to do with coordination or operational aspects rather than planning itself: This was confirmed by KI-D30’s response when he was asked whether the Municipal Council had participated in OTS 2040: “We have **seen** some part of it”.

Similarly, on being asked about their engagement with tourism planning efforts, KI-D38 (LCM), a community leader observed that:

*“They [MoT] have **started presenting** [OTS] to remote areas, but to us being under the management of the city they have **not yet presented**, but we are hoping that when they do, they **will present** to us things that benefit us and benefit the citizens”.*

MoT representatives were very positive about the concept of stakeholder participation. On being asked if the MoT is willing to involve stakeholders in tourism planning, KI-M11 (GO) claimed:

*“They are involved...the interest is there and the coordination with **all** stakeholders is happening...**all were involved. The local community is always in contact** with the senior officials of the MoT. The Minister **visits** all the governorates, meets with the **Walis** and **listens to all** the challenges and the concerns of the communities. The Ministry is also represented in the **Municipal Council** and anything that the **citizens want to raise** as an issue, they can **give** to the MoT representative **in the Council**...We **involve all** citizens on a*

daily basis **through our social media** accounts and we **follow up** on comments arising from the minister's visits to the communities".

Other MoT participants reiterated that tourism stakeholders are invited to participate in planning related issues. According to KI-D37 (GO) "**We select the companies that are related to the services in tourism**". KI-M21 (GO) further elaborated: "**There are workshops involving all those** [companies] who are concerned with the tourism sector". In addition, the MoT is also using social media to engage with the public according to KI-M11 (GO) "**Other than the formal participation which I have mentioned, we have also opened our social media account to get the views, comments, suggestions and complaints. Our doors are open to everyone**".

The above excerpts indicate that there is considerable effort by the MoT to engage stakeholders such as tourism business, academia, and local communities' representatives. That other stakeholders are appreciative of these efforts by the MoT is shown by the recurrent use of expressions such as 'MoT is listening', 'listens to any person', 'listens to all', 'attended many', 'all are included', 'all are participating'. That the MoT representatives consider the Ministry to be accessible and open to everyone is indicated through their emphasis on inclusive expressions such as 'all were involved', 'always in contact', 'visits all', 'involve all citizens', 'opened our social media accounts', 'opened our doors to all'. However, the discursive analysis also reveals that when MoT representatives refer to involving all stakeholders, what they mean is that stakeholders are involved according to the specific issue under consideration. The MoT decides which companies are to be involved according to the issue; hence, they 'select the company' according to the relevance to the issue or 'service'.

Participants such as KI-M10 (PVS), who works for a five-star resort confirmed that MoT's invitations to stakeholders were decided according to the nature of the topic "**There are invitations that come...depending on the topic. The last one was in July. They talked about Uber and Air B & B. From there they launched Marhaba Taxi, so there is progress**". KI-M10 (PVS) went on to explain how her organisation also participated in meetings regarding visa issues, which was resolved through engagement with the relevant stakeholders:

"There are many things that could be changed. For example, the expat who completes his work in Oman cannot come back to Oman without a 'no objection'. There was a lot of talk

and discussion about this issue but now [the decision] they made is that the expat can come back to Oman after two years”.

Private sector stakeholders corroborate that they participate ‘*depending on the topic*’. The example by KI-M10 (PVS), of her organisation’s involvement in discussions on the sharing economy, and the resulting introduction of Marhaba Taxi is a relevant example of selective stakeholder participation. Many participants when referring to their company involvement with MoT, indicate a formal medium such as, ‘*workshops*’, ‘*seminars*’ and ‘*TANFFED*’ which is a more recent development.

When government respondents talk about involving local citizens and ‘*everyone*’ in the excerpts above, it does not mean that they meet with them directly. Rather, their discourse indicates that concerns can be formally raised through representatives such as ‘*Walis*’, ‘*Municipal Councils in each Wilayat to ease communication between citizens and the government*’. The mechanism whereby citizens can directly interact with MoT is through the MoT’s ‘*social media accounts*’. Furthermore, the discourse of municipal council members and community leaders representing the public indicate their involvement is at the operational level i.e., ‘*coordinating and integrating different government organisations*’.

KI-M8 (GO) further elaborated on the selective approach of MoT in identifying stakeholders:

“What we practice now is according to the issue. For example, if the issue is about visas then we call those concerned from the tourism companies, the hotels and the ROP to sort out the issue. If the issue is about the Tour Guides, then we call the tour guides and the companies that employ them. We sit with them according to the topic...in some of the regions there is a resistance to tourism. We sort out such issues with the local authorities, the concerned organisations and the Shura Council”.

The above discourse again indicates that the MoT engages with stakeholders who are identified in each case; it also reveals that issues addressed are more procedural or operational rather than at a planning or macro level.

In the above excerpts by government respondents, some of the discourse that imply participation by all stakeholders, also includes expressions that indicate the participation is selective. Consider these phrases: ‘*we select*’, ‘*we have also opened*’, ‘*our doors are open to everyone*’. The repetition reveals that the power of making decisions regarding stakeholder

participation lies with MoT officials rather than on a formal system of representation which is transparent and organised or based on legal imperatives. Moreover, the statements by local community leaders that *'they [MoT] have started presenting'* and *'we have seen some part of it'* does not indicate participation in the planning process itself; instead, they are efforts by MoT to communicate the plans in OTS 2040 to the local community after they were prepared. The discourse in its entirety therefore implies that MoT has the power to exclude any stakeholder from participation and engagement or reveal parts of the plan selectively to stakeholders.

Interestingly, the non-government stakeholders who were very positive about their participation are either working for government companies or are expatriates in the private sector and academia. The inference here, is that the views of those who are working for government owned companies are careful to be 'politically correct' by using positive but generic expressions such as *'they listen to any person'*. Or they may just be indicating a positive view of the fact that non-ministry stakeholders are being engaged at all. Expatriate participants are particularly enthusiastic in their responses as can be seen in these expressions: *'they were very successful'*, *'personally'*, *'I am very satisfied'*, *'all are participating'*. Their high level of positivity may be either because the experience of being involved in such dialogue is very new, or because being expatriates, they feel the need to be politically correct by expressing enthusiasm for the government's effort to be inclusive.

5.5.2 Stakeholder Power

What is interesting is how MoT defends its selection of stakeholders. According to the participants, MoT selects participants based on their importance rather than their representativeness of the sector. i.e., they select the bigger players. This is evident in the following response from KI-D37 (GO) when asked which companies participated in the discussions on OTS 2040 *"They pick one, for example, Al Bustan [a 5-star hotel], and so on. So, we have about three or four companies along with the other planning organisations in the government"*. Consider the MoT participant KI-D37's (GO), use of the term *'pick'* which is translated from the Arabic word "Yakdho" which implies not just picking but being able to pick someone or something without the other person being able to object (due to a source of influence). KI-M24 (GO) provided a specific example of stakeholders selected for engaging with tourism promotion for OTS 2040, all of them being the bigger tourism related companies in Oman *"Look I will talk again about the OTS.: Oman Air was involved, and*

stakeholders related to promotions were involved.... travel and tour companies, the big hotels, the Airlines, and Ithraa authority". MoT's perception of stakeholder importance is explained by adjectives such as 'big', or by mentioning big companies by name while omitting to mention other companies by name. The participants do not mention a small company by its name but only the big ones such as 'the airlines'.

KI-D37 (GO) emphasised that this selection of bigger companies was not related to power or influence but to expertise. However, expertise or experience is also a source of power and influence which is clearly revealed in the selection of words in bold in the excerpt below:

*"You cannot involve all the people...if you want to involve people, you need to involve those who have **experience**. At the time of planning, you **should ignore things such as monopoly**.
I am talking about **expertise**".*

However, this practice of selecting stakeholders based on expertise was alleged by academics and some private sector participants to produce poor results, KI-M14 (TA) noted: *"I think that is our mistake as we always think that when we plan, we should only talk to experts"*. Similar implications can be seen in this response from KI-M1 (PVS) on whether she thought that decisions related to tourism planning had resulted in good outcomes for the country:

*"**Very little value** because there are **very little things** that were provided. ...These people sitting in the office [the planners] **do not see the reality**; they only see reports or books, but they might have not visited the places and found out what the requirement are"*.

KI-M1(PVS)'s repeated use of negative qualifiers in relation to planning outcomes and planners emphasises the lack of effectiveness even when experts were consulted. The question of expert power is a recurring theme in the discourse. The SME participants responses in particular, reveal that they are left out of the dialogue as they are not considered to be experts. For instance, SME participants, KI-D31 and KI-D36 SM responded that they had never been asked to participate in tourism planning. KI-D31: *"Not at all. I was only called for a committee to interview tour guides for the MoT but not for planning"*. When asked for their thoughts on why they were not included, KI-D36 was very blunt: *"They **do not trust our expertise**"*. Similarly, KI-D31 responded that expatriates (international experts) get the priority in participating: *"For example, they got someone from New Zealand for adventure tourism and he does not know about what is available here and what problems we face"*.

Some participants felt that the OTS participation process was not satisfactory. Consider the following excerpt by (KI-M17), who own an SME establishment, which indicates the participation was very limited and solely at the very beginning of the process with no follow up which left him feeling frustrated:

“The MoT called me and said that they want the companies because they have started the OTS. This was good news...I thought this is a national duty and we must participate. So, I called the Omani people [SMEs] who work every day in tourism, and we attended the meeting. We met with staff from the MoT and two people from the strategy team [THR]. One person from the strategy team who is Jordanian said that that there is no difference between tourism in Oman and tourism in Jordon, they are both the same. When [I disagreed and explained why] he said that he needed to go catch his plane at the airport and left...Then we only saw them at the end of the OTS when they presented it for us which was an absolute shame”.

The public or local community are also not considered capable of participating in tourism-related decision-making efforts by stakeholders, if we consider the words in bold in the excerpt below from KI-D37 (GO). Their perceived lack of relevant knowledge and understanding is also implicit in MoT’s view that local communities do not have to be involved directly and it is ‘*enough*’ to be represented by their committee members and local leaders. As stated by KI-D37 (GO):

*“In my view, it is enough to be represented through the members, because the society sometimes **may not get the message clearly** to be effective...they have selected their representatives who are of an **acceptable level** of education, and awareness”.*

Similarly, KI-M22 (GO) noted that the public can be engaged “*Through the community leaders; it is easier to get their acceptance and support for the developments*”. This view was also shared by local community representatives such as KI-D38 (LCM) who preferred that community involvement should be through them: “*The meeting should be attended by the Governor or the Wali and the Sheikhs. ...They should consult the community leaders and the Sheiks of the areas to be developed*”. It is worth noting that KI-D38 (LCM), who wants community level participation to be only through community leaders, is a tribal leader who gets a monthly salary from the government and hence it is in his interest to protect his role and social status.

The above views reflect the assumption that while local people lack the awareness or education to make effective contributions, local committee members and leaders do not. It is worthwhile to consider whether this view really about awareness and education or whether it is about getting acceptance from the local leaders and committee members who may be easier to influence. This may partly be the reason why municipal committee members such as KI-D30 (MCM), feel their involvement is minimal as they are merely sent documents for their feedback rather than being invited to attend meetings or discussions with the MoT “*We have been presented with some of the 8th five-year plan, and they [merely] sent us a letter when making the strategy for the Dhofar Governorate*”.

The perceived lack of public awareness or expertise may also include elected members of the A’shura Council and the Municipal Councils who were also not listened to as noted by KI-D38 (LCM) “*A’shura Council represents Oman, and the Municipal Council represents the governorates and the regions. And these people say they do not get enough support from the government*”. Some participants especially, local entrepreneurs and community members were critical of the fact that ordinary people were not included in the stakeholder participation process. KI-M3 a local community leader, himself, noted that they are often unaware of developments and stressed that the local community has the right to be included:

“There was no participation of the community. For example, we have in Alseeb area about four or five projects, and we only knew about them by chance. We heard that the Ministry of Tourism has signed agreements without considering the people who are affected by these projects. There are people who have professions and have the right to know”.

Some critics also felt that that the elected members of A’shura Council and the Municipal Councils did not adequately represent the people. These participants wanted the MoT to consult not just with the elite but also with local community groups because they knew their areas best and what does work and what does not work. The discourse below by SME participants reveal that they are expressing their concern that the local community is being left out of the planning process, and the use of ‘*should*’, ‘*will*’, ‘*will not*’ etc indicates their emphasis on local community participation. Secondly, these entrepreneurs identify themselves as part of the local community. KI-D33 (SME) emphasised this by his personalisation of the second sentence starting with ‘I’: “*The **local people** who are in the area **should** participate because they know what is available...**I know** what will work and will not work in **my** area*”. Similarly, KI-D36 (SME) noted “*It is not enough to just have them*

[representatives], *you need the people as well. You have better results when you involve the people*".

The discourse surrounding the selection of stakeholders by the government (MoT) reveals that the government is the most powerful stakeholder, which is to be expected in a non-democratic state. The government selects the stakeholders, and that selection is based on their perceived expertise i.e., stakeholders whom the government believes can add value to the planning and implementation process. However, although these stakeholders are engaged and consulted, the problems and delays in decision-making and implementation by the government continue. Hence although the government confers on 'expert' or 'aware' stakeholders more power through consultations, respondents reveal that the results are still far from what is desired.

5.5.3 Stakeholder Participation and Decision-Making

There was strong criticism from tourism businesses, media, and local community representatives, that even when stakeholders are involved in discussions, final decisions are based on the whims of officials rather than on the recommendations arising from these discussions. The excerpts below reveal a negative discourse about the government dominating decision-making without considering stakeholder input (consider the words in bold). According to KI-M6 (MS):

*"This is a **big problem**... Many of the recommendations, symposiums, and conferences whether it is in tourism or in investments are discussed but, **in the end, they go on shelves**. They become 'shelves prisoners', and they **do not benefit** from them. I think this has also something to do with the mood of the **official who is dominating the decision**. The official sees that **his view is the right one**. He might tell you that I agree with your view, but At the end, the decision is **not made** based on recommendations.*

This above perception was corroborated by several participants. K-MI9 (SGC) noted, "*They consult them **but**...it is **not far away** from organic growth". KI-M2 (PVS) noted that, "*There are a lot of discussions...and there are a lot of pros and cons, but the decisions **come later***". Similarly, KI-M5 (PVS) said, "*I have heard that managers attend meetings and they had been listened to, but there is **nothing done** about what has been said!*". These comments raise the question of if and how stakeholder input informs government decision-making. Reasons for the government not considering such input could be attributed to the fact some*

stakeholders such as private sector organisations focus only on their own companies' interests rather than the interests of the whole sector as noted by KI-M14 (TA). It could also be that some representatives of private sector companies often do not raise their organisations' concerns but rather discuss issues from their personal standpoint, as noted by KI-M24 (GO):

*“Sometimes organisations send their representatives who **may not necessarily talk about their organisations' directions**, but they may talk from their own experience. So that's why sometimes you **find conflict** with directions of some strategies even though they were represented in all of the strategies”.*

Representatives from the Chamber of Commerce which is normally involved in the planning process as representing the private sector was also criticised for focusing only on their own companies' interests, rather than the interests of the whole sector.

In commenting about the effectiveness of decisions, KI-M14 (TA) pointed out that many government decisions do not reflect the market reality, she also reveals that the government (*they*) takes decisions and just informs stakeholders (*us*):

*“now **they** [the government] want to attract the European market and **tell us**, let's teach German and French languages to tour guides; but if you go to the field and speak to tour guides, they say that Europe is not our market and we are not attracting people from these markets and that they are focusing on the Indian and Chinese market. So, the government is focusing on **something** while the market is focusing on **something else**”.*

As shown in earlier sections, some participants noted that lack of communication and coordination between government stakeholders in Oman is to blame for such decision-making as emphasised in these comments by KI-M14 (TA): “*They are **all** working **separately**”*, and KI-M23 (TA): “*There is a **gap** between these stakeholders, in terms of **communication**”*. These gaps according to KI-M23 (TA) led to developers going forward with developments that lead to conflicts with the local community.

This view that communication between stakeholders (especially government bodies) is ineffective is further highlighted by a government official from Dhofar Municipality KI-D26 (GO) who notes “*We consider ourselves that we have more tourism activities in Dhofar compared to any other government organisation. We are the highest spenders and service providers of tourism*”. Yet, despite being one of the highest spenders and service providers

in tourism, Dhofar Municipality has never been involved in tourism planning discussions and their participation in this regard, according to KI-D26 (GO) has not been “*up to our expectations*”. Similarly, KI-D38 (LCM) stated that the MoT should be engaging with all government stakeholders or the community in Dhofar, thus implying that they do not do so currently. Furthermore, by using the term ‘*not just*’ in the last sentence, he implies that the MoT is focusing only on economic aspects.

*“They [the MoT] **should** coordinate with the local people especially the old people who know the heritage and nature, the Ministry of Environment and the Office of the Minister of state and the Governor of Dhofar which represents the whole governorate, **should** be with them. And they **should** give more attention **not just** to the economy of the state”.*

In conclusion, opportunities provided by the MoT to engage tourism stakeholders was seen by several participants to be quite satisfactory, at least from their personal perspectives. However, there is strong criticism that stakeholder engagement does not really influence government decision-making. The discourse by MoT and others reveal that the MoT involves some stakeholders in tourism decision-making and excludes others. The MoT selectively invites tourism stakeholders (mostly tourism companies, academics, and some government bodies) according to the nature of the topic, using workshops and meetings and seminars for planning related efforts. These decisions on which stakeholders to invite are based on MoT’s perception of expertise of the stakeholders, and they tend to choose the bigger tourism companies. The government is selective both in deciding which stakeholders to invite and in deciding what information was to be revealed to different stakeholders.

There appears to be very little engagement with regional government bodies, local SMEs and the communities which are affected by MoT planning decisions. This lack of engagement is linked to the government’s perception of a lack of expertise and awareness among the excluded stakeholders, thereby reducing their influence in the planning process. The MoT engages with the broader public and regional stakeholders through local committee members, regional visits and social media accounts but these are essentially for operational purpose not strategic or policy decision-making. The government’s view that ordinary citizens lack the awareness and education to engage effectively was endorsed by a few local community representatives who preferred that such engagement happen through themselves. However, many stakeholders were critical of such exclusion and claimed that ordinary people need to be included as their local representatives were not listened to by the government.

The selective stakeholder engagement approach based on the perception of expertise, leads to under representation as well as exclusion of relevant stakeholders. The stakeholders who are involved may not be representative of the sector or may be biased according to their personal or organisational objectives. For example, bodies such as the Chamber of Commerce were criticised for not being representative of the private sector but focused instead on their own agenda. As a result, many tourism stakeholders work in isolation and there is a lack of communication even between key players in the government.

Furthermore, the discourse reveals strong criticism that even when stakeholders are engaged, decisions are taken arbitrarily and are not necessarily informed by the stakeholder engagement. For example, there are gaps between the decisions and plans and the actual market realities. Hence one of the main problems is the quality of the decisions as well as lack of coordination, communication and engagement among government stakeholders themselves.

5.6 Stakeholder Participation in OTS 2040

Although there were no direct questions included in the interview guide regarding stakeholder participation in OTS 2040, some participants especially those from MoT referred to OTS 2040 to explain their experience with stakeholder participation. Follow up questions were then asked to gauge their perceptions about the level of stakeholder engagement for OTS 2040. It must be noted that the government has not yet published OTS 2040 in its entirety, even though it was completed in 2016 and was given widespread publicity, so very few individuals have seen the completed OTS 2040 in full, the perceptions of OTS 2040 of the non-MoT participants does not reflect a critical awareness of the contents. Instead, the views expressed by MoT participants on OTS 2040 were based on their involvement with its preparation and any resulting discussions.

MoT's participants' responses reveal that they consider OTS 2040 as a solution that has addressed the current weaknesses in the tourism planning process. This is evident in many positive inflections (words in bold in the excerpt below) in the discourse of KI-D37 (GO) which refers to the country of origin of the consultancy company THR and their prior experience as key reasons for the success of OTS 2040 (consider words in bold):

*“THR is a Spanish company and.... Spain is a **very strong country in tourism**. THR wrote tourism strategies for Spain and other tourism regions around the world.....The OTS was*

*not done for governorates but rather for tourism areas in Oman. And this is **very important** when you plan for tourism, you should first start with identifying the tourism attraction locations and then move. So, from my point of view we are **planning properly both based on systems and plans**".*

Similar positive emphases are seen in the following excerpt describing OTS 2040 by KI-M11 (GO), referring to its flexibility and self-evaluation mechanisms:

*"The OTS [2040] has plans and programmes that will cover the period from now until 2040. In each phase the OTS **will be** evaluated. The programmes are divided into five-year plans and **will be evaluated and followed up**. The OTS was **made flexible** to cope with the developments and changes whether financial or political, or other developments".*

Similarly, the previous lack of planning and the resulting sense of accomplishment with the OTS 2040 is also evident in this statement from KI-D25 (GO): *"With the OTS 2040 we **have something for the first time**, and this shows that the country is **giving attention** to the tourism sector"*.

Regarding stakeholder engagement in the process of compiling the report, MoT respondents echoed statements in the OTS 2040 document that there was extensive stakeholder participation. KI-D37 (GO) said:

"There was a team at the MoT level- headed by the Undersecretary who worked with THR [consultancy company] and coordinated with the other government organisations. Throughout the study the private and local communities were involved".

KI-M8 (GO) noted that approximately 700 people participated in OTS 2040, and after preparation it was presented to all the governorates. He emphasised that OTS was everybody's strategy as no tourism stakeholder was left out of the process including citizens. Consider the use of expressions such as '***all and without any exception***' (in bold in the excerpt below) which imply a very high level of participation and inclusiveness. The repeated use of 'we' is an attempt to credit the MoT with the successful preparation of OTS 2040:

*"700 people were involved in preparing the OTS. After this we had a meeting in all the governorates with **all those who have a stake or are interested** in tourism. There was a presentation about the OTS and its aims. The **attendees** were asked about their views on the*

*OTS and how would they like to see tourism and their aspirations for tourism in their governorates. This was done in **all** the governorates in Oman **without any exceptions**. So, the strategy which we developed is the strategy of **all the partners, all of those** who are interested in tourism...**we** built the strategy, **we** formed committees that included **all** private sector, hotels, companies, colleges, academics, the citizens”.*

KI-M11 (GO) listed the organisations that were involved in the OTS project:

*“When the MoT was asked to develop the OTS, it coordinated with academic institutions, the Royal Omani Police, service ministries that facilitate tourism movements [such as], Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Ministry of Manpower, Ministry of Transport and Telecommunications, Oman Chamber of Commerce, and businessmen, banks, both government and private, Ministry of Interior and the Governorates, and the local citizens were met and asked for their views and their aspirations towards tourism. Society’ likes and dislikes, **all** were considered, and this was how the OTS is developed”.*

The MoT respondents’ repeatedly used ‘we’ in their discourse when referring to the process of developing OTS 2040. Consider these expressions: ‘*the strategy which we developed*’, ‘*we built the strategy*’, ‘*we formed committees*’, ‘*and we had a meeting*’. While the MoT officials associated themselves most closely with the development of OTS 2040, other stakeholders were ‘*coordinated*’, ‘*involved*’, ‘*asked about their views*’, ‘*were met*’ and ‘*asked for their views and aspirations*’. This distinction implies that the process was not very collaborative but rather that the MoT controlled the process of preparing and disseminating OTS 2040. MoT claims that the process of stakeholder participation was a very inclusive one, but their discourse makes it clear that MoT officials consider the MoT as the primary stakeholder while all others including tourism businesses are secondary stakeholders or ‘partners’. It is stated that OTS 2040 was ‘*presented*’ to the governorates and those with a stake in tourism in the governorates ‘*after*’ it was prepared, yet it is claimed that the “*strategy which we developed is the strategy of all the partners, all of those who are interested in tourism*”. The implied inference here is that retrospective approval was given by some stakeholders, and therefore in the end, everybody’s input was considered by the consultants and MoT in creating OTS 2040. According to KI-M24, (GO), this diversity is what gave the OTS 2040 its strength.

“The OTS [2040] has done excellent work with participation. Because the OTS tender had included the research council and many other members. So, the diversity that generated the OTS gave it strength”.

Likewise, KI-D25 (GO) said *“When the MoT developed the OTS all the stakeholders were included in brainstorming and in teamwork”*. KI-M21 (GO) asserted:

“Everybody participated, there is a partnership, there were workshops with all those who are concerned about the tourism sector, such as, the Governors, the municipalities, and the Supreme Council of Planning, and everyone was involved”.

However, when asked what the workshops were intended for or the extent to which the stakeholder input in the workshops was taken into account, KI-M21 (GO) could not answer. MoT representatives referred again to selecting stakeholders based on their expertise or connection to specific issues to be considered in the planning process. For instance, KI-M21 (GO) describes an approach where different stakeholders were contacted (probably implying consulted) according to their ‘specialisation’ or relevance to the issues under consideration for OTS 2040. For example, they ‘contacted’ the Ministry of Environment for environmental issues and the Ministry of Municipalities was ‘contacted’ regarding village issues:

*“We have a team from the Ministry which is tasked with communicating with THR. The team together with THR **contacted the stakeholders** according to their specialism. For example, [regarding] the issues that relate to the environment they **contacted the Ministry of Environment**; regarding village issues they **contacted the Ministry of Municipalities**; and the Ministry of Housing [for housing issues], all were involved according to the nature of their work”.*

‘Contacting’ different organisations as stated above, does not necessarily mean that they were involved in planning; contact could also be for requesting data or information that these organisations possess or are responsible for. KI- D37 (GO), when asked specifically about how participants from the private sector were selected, said: *“We **select the companies that are related to the services in tourism**”*. Similarly, KI-M8 (GO) emphasised the area of ‘specialisation’ of the stakeholder was the main consideration for forming committees for feedback purposes:

*“There were many committees according to the specialisation, for example, there were committees for competitiveness, for governance and management, and so on. We also included the Ministries whose scope of work relates to the Ministry of Tourism, such as the Ministry of Environment, the Supreme Council of Planning, and the Ministry of Industry and Commerce...also the private sector partners...We asked THR to **present** each report they produce to these committees to get their feedback and amend it, so that the OTS is made to suit the Omani tourism sector...we had meetings in all the governorates with those **who have a stake or are interested** in tourism. There was a **presentation** about the OTS and its aims. The attendees were **asked about their views** on the OTS strategy and how would they like to see the tourism and their aspirations for tourism in their governorates”.*

The above excerpt indicates that various committees were formed on key areas, but these committees were used for the purpose of getting feedback from the participants on ‘reports’ (plans?) that were presented by the consultancy firm THR. Consider the sentence: ‘we asked THR to present each report... to the committees’. This implies that these reports had already been prepared by THR and the feedback was used for making OTS 2040 more contextualised or ‘made to suit the Omani tourism sector’. So, the relevant question here is what and who contribute to these reports and to what extent did stakeholder participation inform them from the outset? Furthermore, the various excerpts from the MoT officials indicate different forums for engaging with stakeholders for OTS such as: ‘workshops presentations’, ‘brainstorming’, ‘meetings’, ‘reports’, and ‘correspondence’.

According to KI-D25 (GO), all relevant stakeholders were involved in giving feedback on the legislative framework in relation to OTS 2040:

“The legislation for the tourism sector was presented before approval to businessmen, hotels, chamber of commerce, travel and tourism companies, State Council, Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Legal Affairs and A’shura Council and gave their views on the proposed laws and regulations”.

When asked whether these views were considered, KI-D25 (GO) affirmed “Yes, everything which reached [consensus] in the discussions is taken for example changing some articles in the law”.

However, KI-D37 (GO), a senior MoT official in Dhofar, when asked whether stakeholders input and feedback about OTS 2040 influenced decisions, had a completely different

interpretation about OTS 2040: “*We are here talking about the OTS study, this study has no decisions, the study is done by experts who take the views and then provide recommendations*”. This excerpt explicitly reveals that no decisions are taken based on stakeholder input or on the strategy or about OTS 2040 itself. Therefore, the plans themselves are not decisions but recommendations. The consultants (experts) prepare the strategy and get stakeholder views on their proposals. The extent to which stakeholder input informed the strategy itself can probably be confirmed only by the consultants. Expert power in creating OTS 2040 was significant; and as noted by a MoT official earlier, stakeholder participation may have been used only for contextualisation of the strategy. However, in the final outcome, such strategies or plans by themselves have little value if they are not by the final decision makers in the government or if they are not implemented.

Nevertheless, there were many positive interpretations of stakeholder participation in the preparation of OTS 2040 (see words in bold in the excerpts below). KI-M21 (GO) noted that MoT was happy with the stakeholder participation process: “*We are **satisfied**, because we had asked them particular issues during the OTS*”. This implies that the MoT’s satisfaction was not necessarily about the participation itself but only because they ‘*asked participants particular issues*’ that the MoT wanted to ask. Similarly, KI-M9 (TA) an academic and previously a senior government employee, emphasised the positivity exuded by stakeholders who participated in OTS 2040 and the positiveness of the process itself as all stakeholders were ‘*listening*’:

*“I found participation **very positive**, the people who took part were **very positive** and there was discussion and listening from **all the stakeholders**, government, A’shura members, private sector, local communities and educational institutions”.*

KI-M9 (TA) asserted that the OTS 2040 exercise was a very good example of stakeholder participation: “*what was made recently was **very good**. The MoT had asked **for views** in exhibitions, websites, and internet, all were done. Participation was **opened for all**: those who have interest can participate*”. However, one must consider whether if KI-M9 (TA)’s very positive description of the stakeholder participation process is influenced both by his current position working in a government-owned academic institution and by his previous experience in the government sector when very few participants other than from the government took part in planning (such as Vision 2020). Careful analysis of his discourse indicates that he is positive about participation being opened up and not necessarily about the

quality or extent of the participation. This can be seen in his repeated emphasis on what was done: *‘the MoT asked for views’, ‘all were done’, and ‘opened for all’*.

However, several related government bodies denied that their organisations were involved in the process preparing the OTS 2040. Despite all the issues related to land allocation noted by MoT officials themselves, the response of a senior official from the Ministry of Housing, KI-M7 (GO), when asked whether his organisation participated in OTS 2040 was: *“No, they did not sit with us, but we heard about it”*.

KI-D30 (MCM) stressed that the Muscat Municipal Council would at least like to see the draft plans (OTS 2040) before approval as there is no point in giving feedback after plans have been approved:

We hope that the MoT presents us as with the draft plans before approval, so we might have a view that could be helpful to the state. But when we get an approved plan just to look at it then giving your views is not worth it”.

Some of the larger tour operators in Oman also said they had not participated in the OTS 2040. For example, KI-M2 (PVS) and KI-M19 (SGCS), when asked whether their companies had been involved in OTS 2040, both responded *“I do not think so”*. A CEO of a media company, KI-M40, when asked whether he or his organisation were ever involved in tourism planning, said *“No”*, and when he was asked why, said, *“No one called me”*. According to KI-M18, her NGO had never taken part in tourism planning:

“I think the only interaction that we have had with the MoT was when we were trying to develop some guidelines for whales and tourism watching. So, we came up with some guidelines and we tried to interact with MoT... we were not requested to come [and be involved]”.

KI-D37 (GO) had three suggestions for improving stakeholder participation in the implementation of OTS 2040. His use of modality to emphasise what should be done is present throughout his discourse. First, he notes that the government needed to prepare the public for its implementation: *“You **must** prepare the people. There **should have been** enough time allowed to prepare the ground before implementing. They want to start implementing it in 2018”*. Second, he felt that OTS should not be implemented centrally but rather regionally so that there is *“decentralization in implementing the plans”*. Third, KI-D37 (GO) felt that a

single department within the MoT must be assigned responsibility for implementing OTS 2040. He considered this was important to address all the current problems with coordination and monitoring in implementation. A key point was the emphasis on staff in this department being adequately qualified i.e., having the expertise to carry out these roles effectively:

*“We **need** to have a department within the MoT that is **just** responsible for following and implementing the **plan**, and this department **should** coordinate with other organisations.*

*Secondly, the team in this department **should** be qualified and **should** be specialised in implementing this plan. You **should** free the people implementing it from other duties. The consultant who wrote the plan said that the plan **should** be followed up every day. The SCP **should** coordinate with all the concerned organisations to prepare some of the aspects. You **need** at least two years to work on the current situation.”*

In summary, this section has revealed how the different stakeholders perceived their own experience (or lack of) with stakeholder participation in OTS 2040. The MoT initiated the process of developing OTS 2040 by appointing a consultancy company, THR. Under the clear guidance of the MoT, selected stakeholders were invited to participate in the process according to their relevance to issues under consideration. Stakeholder engagement took place evidently at different stages i.e., before and after OTS 2040 was developed. All respondents who participated in the process were quite positive about the participative process. However, the emphasis in their sentiments is on the fact that they were involved and that they were listened to. What needs to be considered is whether the positivity stems from the fact that involvement of non-governmental stakeholders in a national planning exercise is ground-breaking in itself or whether they were really satisfied with the outcomes of their engagement.

5.7 More vs Less Stakeholder Participation

A key question to be examined in the current context of lack of communication and coordination is whether more stakeholder participation in tourism planning decisions in Oman would be advantageous or disadvantageous. The overwhelming response from all stakeholder groups in this study is that stakeholder participation is essential for successful tourism planning in Oman. They felt that more stakeholder participation would help in striking a better balance between economic and environmental/societal considerations. The

repeated use of modal words (in bold) in their discourse demonstrates the importance they place on participation.

KI-D26 (GO), when asked whether it is important to involve all stakeholders in tourism planning, said, “yes, it is a **must**”. KI-M13 (PFI) responded similarly to the same question:

*“In my view, it is a **must**...Tourism is a vast and a big sector that is related to all the society groups, because tourism in Oman is all round the country. So, you **must** consult and **get** the ideas from everywhere”.*

Respondents stated that the MoT’s track record when it came to decisions taken without stakeholder engagement was not impressive. KI- D37(GO), a government official from the MoE, claimed “*The one who is damaging the environment is **not the tourists**, but it is unfortunately the government organisations... [because of] random planning”.*

Several participants said repeatedly that more stakeholder participation could speed up decision-making. According to them, when all the relevant stakeholders are present decision-making will be faster. KI-M7 (GO) held that “*Because they will all be at one table it will make decision-making **easier***”. Similar views were expressed by KI-D33 (PVS), “*We will all meet at the same time and place and **make** the decision”*, and KI-M1(PVS) who noted “*If such procedures are done in a wise way and involving people who can make decisions then it [decisions] **will not take time***”. Likewise, KI-M2 (PVS) claimed: “*When you have all the key players at the table then decisions can be **taken immediately**. Now what happens is that the decisions take a lot of time”*. KI-D36 (SME), when asked whether more stakeholder participation will slow the planning and decision-making process, was very emphatic in her denial “*No, it will not slow down, it is the opposite. They will be able to deliver the information **accurately** with its **full** details”*. Similarly, KI-M22 (GO) stated: “*If you make a committee from **all** these stakeholders and they make the decisions **instantly**, then this would be the correct way to do it. You cannot work isolated from other organisations; you need all of them”*. KI-D26 (GO) said lack of stakeholder participation would increase bureaucracy: “*You **need to** ease a lot of procedures, if you do not involve them, there will be organisations that will be barred from tourism; therefore, you will face more problems and therefore more delay”*”.

The above excerpts seem to imply that non-governmental stakeholders such as SMEs (them) should be involved in decision-making through consensus building. This is an interesting and

important point to be considered in a non-democratic state and one where most planning decisions are not taken even at Ministry level but at a higher level such as the Supreme Planning Council or the Ministerial Council. Therefore, these aspirations for decisions by involving all stakeholders sitting at one table are likely directed towards operational rather than policy level decisions. This is revealed in the words and expressions such as ‘*procedures*’, ‘*cannot work isolated*’, ‘*it will not take time*’. Another consideration to bear in mind about consensus is religion. Because of differences in Islamic doctrine followed by the majority of Omanis in Muscat (Ibadhi), where people are more open, and Dhofar (Sunni), where people are more conservative, one would expect a difference in views on how much stakeholder participation is needed. It would be reasonable to find that stakeholders in Dhofar would favour less participation than in Muscat. However, the excerpts above show no difference between the two with all respondents favouring more stakeholder participation.

Some interviewees held that stakeholder participation would improve the quality of tourism planning decisions because it would be based on more comprehensive views than just the views of bigger or more powerful stakeholders who have monopoly power. For example, KI-M23 (TA) stressed that, “*The decision-making will be more dynamic, and there will be no monopoly of decision-making*”. KI-M5 (PVS) felt that even if stakeholder participation slowed decisions, it would be worth it to get better decisions “*It is better to involve them [because] at the end we care about the results. We do not just want to make decisions which in the end tend to be wrong decisions that cause other problems...*”. Emphasising the importance of public participation in taking better decisions, a local community leader said, “*you might find people who are motivated to participate in these projects, and they will give you the advantages and the disadvantages of the project [in their areas]*”. However, several participants were sceptical about the value of more stakeholder participation in tourism planning. KI-M19 (SGCS) noted that although the politically correct answer is that stakeholder participation will add more value, in practice, it is better to have experts making tourism planning issues:

“I will give you two answers political and practical. The political answer involves the community, society, and the ministry takes guidance and all of that which people will tell you. But if you talk to taxi drivers you will end up nowhere. If you want practical answers, get a professional company to drive and set up the tourism strategy and then have [opinion] polls to implement it”.

The inference here is that tourism planning is best done by experts so that decisions can be taken by the government, while stakeholder participation is best done through polls and surveys at the time of implementation. The overall tone is that the less stakeholder participation the better. The discourse also relegates other stakeholders or possibly the public, to the level of ‘*taxi drivers*’ and not important, while experts as stakeholders are seen as adequate for the practical purposes of planning. Wider stakeholder participation is viewed as merely a matter of political correctness and not a practical approach to planning and decision-making.

Therefore, contrary to most opinions that more participation can help ensure faster decision making, some participants did feel that stakeholder participation would further slowdown decision-making. For example, KI-M8 (GO) claimed that stakeholder participation: “*slows down the implementation. All talk about the importance of tourism but not when it comes to implementation*”. However, some of this discourse (presented below) indicates that it is the bureaucratic forums chosen for stakeholder engagement that these critics object to, rather than wider participation itself. For instance, in Oman, many people believe that committees are formed to avoid doing something. So, KI-D31 (SME) said committees will not help: “*We should not make any committees because they delay things*”. KI-D28 (GO) agreed “*We should involve people, but we should not expand in committees and councils because they delay the process. Open discussions, the social media, the awareness, and the short surveys are important*”.

Some MoT representatives argued that it can take much time and effort to convince stakeholders of the benefits of tourism-related efforts, an argument that is linked to stakeholders’ limited level of awareness and experience. For example, KI-M8 (GO) stated “*Another thing is not realising the benefits. And it takes a lot of effort to explain the benefits*”. Even some people within the tourism sector do not understand it”. Similarly, KI-M8 (GO) said that:

“*Sometimes you bring someone whom you see as a partner...they do not understand the tourism sector. Especially in Oman we see this, yes, he owns a company, but the company is not run by him, so he does not know about the tourism sector*”.

However, the view that stakeholders are not aware of the benefits of tourism is not borne out by this study which finds that all stakeholders involved were very much aware of the benefits that tourism could bring; they were just not getting these benefits.

In conclusion, although there were some dissenting voices, most participants felt that more stakeholder participation offers better alignment between economic development and environmental or societal concerns and there was no difference in views between respondents from Muscat and Dhofar. Stakeholder participation is seen as an important tool for tourism planning which can enhance both the quality of decisions made as well as the speed of decision-making, which are both major weaknesses in the current system. However, the forums or methods of stakeholder engagement need to be carefully considered so that they are not bureaucratic and results in even slower decision-making and waste of time. A few participants, mainly government officials, are of the view that stakeholder participation is not practically feasible and will waste time and effort; a view linked to the perception that many tourism stakeholders with the exception of the bigger companies lack understanding of the benefits or the complexities of the tourism sector.

5.8 Stakeholder Motives for Participation

Participants were asked about their own motivations and willingness as stakeholders to participate in tourism planning. Many interviewees indicated that they were willing to take part in tourism although they differed in their reasons and motivations.

For example, many private sector participants wanted to participate because they thought this would help to develop the tourism sector in Oman. The words that are most repeated in their discourse refer to growth and development, particularly the development of Oman. As KI-D27 (PVS) stated: *“For sure we will be there in anything that **helps tourism in Oman**”*. Similarly, KI-D35 (SME) stressed: *“I have no problem, if I am listened to. Because I want my **country to be developed**”*. Similarly, KI-M16 stated that he would participate *“... because I am **very enthusiastic about development**; there are many things that **needs development**”*. KI-M5 (PVS), a local entrepreneur, expressed his motivation thus: *“To **develop** our country and be proud of our country”*. KI- D31 (SME) a local entrepreneur noted, *‘Why not’, ‘if its aims are **development that will benefit us**’, ‘our children and grandchildren’, ‘and we [will] know the objectives of the MoT’*. The repeated use of words such as *‘help and develop’* emphasises the aspirations of these participants to see the tourism sector and their country in

a better stage of development from their own contributions to this process. Moreover, in the above excerpts, participants use words such as *'Oman, our country. our children, grandchildren'*, which imply that there would be more unity and development with more stakeholder participation rather than clashes. Participants including those from the private sector therefore refer to the overall public interest as their main motivation for participating.

Tourism academics wanted to participate for professional reasons. For example, KI-M14 (TA), noted that as academics they would want to participate: *"because we are academics, and we do a lot of research and we want to be up-to-date with what is happening. I think our knowledge would benefit the sector"*. KI-M9 (TA) observed that participation in tourism planning enabled them to develop educational courses for students and to train for careers in tourism: *"our knowledge of the future tourism products that comes through participation in the planning process helps us develop our education to support the tourism development needs"*.

KI-M13, a pension fund investor, was more personal in his motivations; he felt that participation in tourism planning would improve his organisation's investment decisions: *"We have annual and long-term planning investments, and we need to know where to invest"*. Local community members wanted to see their interests are protected and to learn new skills. For example, KI-M3 (LCM) said, *"I will learn about planning and gain good skills for life in general"*. NGOs wanted to participate to ensure that environmental requirements of business are met. As KI-M18 (NGO) noted *"Sure, as environmentalists ... we might have the potential to give a different viewpoint which might have otherwise been overlooked. We may have scientific information that positively contribute to tourism planning"*. This excerpt does not only express the MoE participant's motives for participation, but also implies that MoT's policy direction is unknown to the MoE and through participation this gap can be plugged.

Government representatives noted that their respective organisations need to be involved more with tourism related efforts. For example, Dhofar Municipality representatives said they need to participate in tourism planning because they had so many tourism activities. KI-D26 (GO) and KI-M20 (GO) both from the MoE, felt that MoE participation in tourism planning would help improve environmental stewardship within communities: *"If the direction of the MoT is moved towards eco-tourism, this will help promote Oman's environmental conservation, and it will raise the local awareness of environment which we [MoE] work for"*.

Participants were also asked at what stage should stakeholders be engaged in the planning process. Several participants especially from tourism businesses and academia, preferred participation at the early stage of the planning process. This is clearly communicated in the following excerpts:

KI-D33 (PVS): *“I should be **involved at the beginning**”*,

KI-M14 (TA): *“**From the very beginning**”*,

KI-M3 (LCM): *“They have the priority to **be consulted at the beginning**”*,

KI-M12 (PVS): ***I think at the very beginning**, we have our points to make.”*.

Similarly, KI-M18 (NGO) emphasised that NGOs want early engagement, so they can have their environmental concerns considered from the beginning: *“**Early**, so that you can integrate everything from the start”*. Two other participants KI-D36 (SME) and KI-M23 (TA) argued they should be involved during the initial stages as they have nothing to do with the implementation stage later. KI-D36 (SME) stated *“During the **initial phases when setting vision and objectives**, because I am not the one who will implement plans”*, and KI-M23 (TA): *“During implementations we have nothing to do, but **we should participate at the initial stages**”*.

The repetition and recurrence of phrases such as ‘*at the beginning*’, ‘*early*’, ‘*when setting the vision and objectives*’, ‘*at the very beginning*’ emphasises the participants’ view that stakeholders must be engaged in the planning process at the outset. These excerpts imply that if stakeholder input is sought early enough in the planning process, their contribution can substantially inform the outcomes.

Other government and local community respondents felt that they should be engaged throughout the tourism planning process as seen from the following responses:

KI-M22 (GO): *“**At the beginning** when they start, and we **must be there until the end**”*.

KI-D30 (MCM): ***Before implementing the projects**. Our role is **not just at the beginning** to give our views but also to **follow up** on projects development”*.

KI-D26 (GO): *“We want to be **continuously involved**”*.

This use of words such as ‘we’ and ‘our role’ indicate that these participants consider their organisations to be key stakeholders. Expressions such as ‘follow up’, ‘continuously involved’, ‘must be there until the end’, conveys their opinion of the extensive roles they feel their organisations should play in the planning and implementation process as important.

In summary, there is a lot of enthusiasm among all stakeholders to participate and their motives range from being able to contribute to the development of their tourism sector, for their own professional and personal growth and for the economic development of Oman. Most participants equate their participation with contributing to the good of the sector and the country. Many want to contribute to the planning process at the beginning i.e., at the stage where they feel they can have the most impact on the outcomes as compared to being told of the plans at the end.

5.9 Key Stakeholders in Tourism Planning

There was no agreement among participants on the key stakeholders who should be involved in tourism planning. As was seen in section 5.6, the MoT considers themselves and tourism businesses as the key stakeholders to be involved in OTS 2040 with expert stakeholders for validation purposes. However, a wide range of different governmental and non-governmental stakeholders were suggested by participants.

Many respondents stressed the importance of governmental ministries as stakeholders. For example, KI-D31 (SME owner) listed the following ministries which must be involved in tourism planning in order to ensure better coordination of decisions:

“The ROP, the Ministry of Transport and Telecommunication, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Oman Air, the Inspectors from MoT, the registration section from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, and Municipality Inspectors who visit the tourism companies”.

This emphasis on including all governmental bodies involved in operational or administrative decisions and approvals (that cause delays) was also seen in the discourse of others such as KI-D37 (GO):

“All the government stakeholders that provide services such as the police for the visas, the Ministry of Manpower for the employment and training of people, the Ministry of

Commerce and Industry for the investment regulations, the Security, the local governors must be there, and the MoE”.

A government official, KI-M21 (GO), said the “*The most important [stakeholders] are the Ministry of Housing and the Supreme Council of Planning*”. Similarly, KI-D26 (GO) said it “*should be the SCP, the Municipalities, the MoE, The MoT, **the Royal Court** and all those concerned, those [institutions] which tourists will deal with have to be involved*”. It is worth noting that ‘*the Royal Court*’ does not have any role in tourism, but the hidden inference here is power: The Royal Court represent His Majesty directly, and therefore their involvement is advocated to add political clout to the participative process. But the hidden inference here is power, and therefore their involvement is advocated to add importance. KI-M20 (GO) focused on all the different ministries that are involved in decisions and services that directly or indirectly affect tourism activities and the private sector, namely “*The Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Commerce, and the Ministry of Housing (which is very important because we suffer a lot from the land allocation system), the Ministry of Industry, and private sectors companies*”. According to local community leader, KI-M3 (LCM), the location of proposed attractions has a role to play in deciding who should participate in planning: “*For example, if it’s near the sea, they should involve the Ministry of Fisheries, the Ministry of Environment, the Municipal Council members and the community leaders*”.

This call for more participation by governmental stakeholders is in line with findings in the previous sections that highlight a fragmented and slow decision-making system with multiple government bodies involved. The solution these participants are suggesting is for these government stakeholders to come together to resolve these weaknesses in decision-making. However, different respondents chose different ministries as stakeholders. For example, KI-D32 (TA) felt that the planning and management of marine/coastal tourism should involve “*The Ministry of Fisheries, the MoT, and the Municipalities*”, but KI-M11 (GO) said the process should involve “*the Coast Guard, the MoE, and the Ministry of Heritage if there is any kind of heritage in the area*”. The above respondents who only wanted participation to be though elite ‘*leaders*’ are often well connected to government officials and hence they want to protect their status.

Other respondents suggested that only the bigger players or organisations must participate in tourism planning efforts as only they had the required awareness or expertise. According to

KI-D32 (TA) these were “*The MoT, Omran Company, International Tourism and Tour companies*”.

For KI-M12 (PVS), the international tour operators needed to be involved and he justified it thus: “*My only suggestion is inviting some tour operators who bring the top 10% business to Oman*”. According to KI-D27 (PVS) the target audience should be involved such as “*travel agencies, the dealers, the DMCs, these people who manage the travel offices and the hotels with the MoT*”. These excerpts indicate that as far as the private sector is concerned, the key stakeholders are essentially the tourism related businesses both international (such as tour operators) and local and the MoT.

KI-M14 (TA) claimed that the tourism sector representatives in the Chamber of Commerce needed more power to influence government decision-making: “*... they should have more power - the power to influence planning and regulations because they represent the sector*”. But here the emphasis is on a more equitable balance of power within the wider tourism sector because the Chamber of Commerce includes both large and small players.

KI-M23 (TA) considers it important to include regional and international companies:

“From GCC countries, Arab companies like the Egyptian Sameeh Souwiras, and the international investors, real estate development companies such as Immar and Dammac from Dubai, private sector companies from Oman and abroad”.

KI-M23 (TA) claimed all groups that have a stake in tourism in Oman should be involved in the planning process:

“There are other stakeholders such as investment funds, media, journalists, social media, administrative groups... and the companies like local airlines and regional airlines, such as Oman Air, Qatar Airline and Emirates., Oman Airport management companies, transport companies. All those who have stakes in the tourism in Oman”.

Other participants urged the involvement of people on the ground – i.e., at the operational level - since they have direct knowledge of issues and problems on the ground. KI-D31 (SME owner) argued that “*people on the ground*” – i.e., those who work directly with tourists – from all tourism-related business should be involved so that there is understanding of real issues. He pointed out that: “*... you cannot get a brigadier from the RoP who knows nothing*

about visas and stamps ...Those who directly meet tourists and receive complaints should be involved in the planning”.

Other participants advocated more local involvement. Such emphasis on the importance of the voice of local people is repeated by many stakeholders from all groups for example, KI-D33 (PVS): *“The MoT, the Municipalities, the local people and the tourism companies”*. KI-D31 (SME): *“The local community, and the local authorities”*. KI-D36 (SME): *“The local community, and the legislators who listen to the people, take their concerns, and ensure that they do not migrate from their area to another”*. KI-M3 (LCM): *“A’shura members, the Municipal Council members, and the community leaders”*. KI-M24, (GO): *“The Coast Guards, A’shura members and the local people”*. KI-D37 (GO) also emphasised that fishermen must be involved: *“The local fishermen, Sunana Albahar committee, the local governors and the MoE”*. KI-M1 (PVS) recommended that local people who are engaged in tourism activities, must be involved as they provide services to tourists and interact with them at the regional destinations and hence can be a rich source of ideas.

However, there was controversy over how to achieve local involvement: in particular, whether to rely on local representatives or to engage members of the public directly (representative versus direct democracy). Community leaders and Municipal committee members urged their involvement as representatives of local communities. For instance, KI-D30 (MCM) believed that the best way to involve the public and society is through their local elected representatives: *“When the people give their views to the Municipal Council, they will send it to the government then you must be very sure that there is societal consensus”*. The responses of Local Community Members (LCM) and Municipal Council Members (MCM) in the excerpts below, favoured their own involvement as representatives of the public (in bold). KI-D34 (TA), said such decisions should involve: *“The MoT, The Ministry of Fisheries, the **Wali** and the **local people**”*. Similarly, KI-D30 (MCM) recommended maximum representation by the public and community through:

*“The **Wali** and **Sunana Albahar Committees**, the **MC** and **A’shura** members. When I refer to taking the society view, I am always referring for it to be taken through the elected members. This is a kind of democracy”*.

KI-M3 (LCM) held that local participation should be *“Through the community leaders and being invited to attend presentations”*. KI-M6 (MS) was of the same opinion: *“If you want*

to consult everybody you will not do anything. You have elected members you can sit with them and discuss with them". An interesting suggestion came from a small investor, KI-D31, who held that individuals participating from the different stakeholder groups should be changed every year to ensure a continuous infusion of new ideas: *"We want each year a different representative from the companies. For example, if I am selected to be in 2017 then I should not be there in 2018"*.

By contrast to representative participation, KI-D36 (SME) claimed it would be better for the local communities to be involved directly through polling mechanisms such as surveys. For example, he noted that in Salalah there are about 400,000 people, and the best way to involve them *"through surveys"*. KI-M13 (PFI) said the best way to involve local communities directly was *"Through dialogue, but it should be well organised and done in a scientific way. A clear picture must be given to participants so that the results will be good"*. KI-M17 (SME), said dialogue with coastal stakeholders such as fishermen and the members of the local community having exposure and awareness is necessary in coastal tourism planning:

"Even fishermen should attend, you do not necessarily take their views, but sometimes they can give you good views. Also, the businessmen, those who have relation with tourism, the people who travel from the village, and cultured people".

The importance of dialogue was also stressed by KI-M14 (TA) who felt that face-to-face meetings and engaging with local communities and coastal stakeholders were vital: *"I think the best way is to go to them, because you do not know their educational level and they might not know about social media and the advance technology that we use today"*.

In addition to surveys and face to face dialogue, respondents' suggestions for interacting directly with stakeholders included symposiums. According to KI-D26 (GO) *"all should attend...a symposium for the tourism sector"*. KI-M5 (PVS) also recommended *"symposiums for tourism planning, where views are listened to from individuals representing all categories"*. Although these participants imply that all different stakeholders must be included i.e., *'all should attend'*, and *'represent all categories'*, it is not conceivable that in Oman, ordinary citizens and local fishermen would attend national level symposiums to share their views.

The seriousness with which some respondents took the notion of stakeholder participation (whether representative or direct) is made clear by the proposal to establish a formal body for

organising stakeholder participation in tourism planning. KI-M14 (TA), said that this body should be in a position of higher authority than the MoT, so that all relevant parties can be brought together. As can be seen, this discourse (below) explicitly states that the MoT does not have the power or authority over other government organisations to do this effectively:

*“There should be a body or a department at the Supreme Council, they **should have the power to...bring everyone together.** If the responsibility of [stakeholder participation in] tourism planning is at a ministry level, then as a ministry it will not have an authority over the other ministries because they are both at the same level and that is why you need a higher-level body”.*

KI-M23 (TA) supported this idea of a higher authority or ‘supreme’ stakeholder council with the power to “gather all stakeholders” and to enforce its decisions:

“A Higher Council of Tourism should be formed...not within the Ministry of Tourism..... Its remit should be the development of social, economic and environmental [considerations] and [it should] gather all these stakeholders under its umbrella. This council could be at the ministerial level consist of six concerned ministries: the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Municipalities, the Ministry of Tourism, and the Ministry of Education, businessmen; media; the local community, public sector companies such as the Oman Airport Management Company, investments funds such as the Rafd Fund, and the Oman Chamber of Commerce...All need to be involved in a supreme council, whose members could be around 20...members would meet three or four times a year...and make decisions that are compulsory...decisions should be enforced on those organisations by stakeholders who are represented in the council”.

The two excerpts above with their emphasis on a higher authority to ensure effective stakeholder participation, offers what the participants see as a solution to the fragmented and overlapping decision-making process, lack of communication and isolation of stakeholders and the resulting problems and delays in planning and implementation. Reference to the ‘power to bring everyone together’ and ‘gather all these stakeholders under its umbrella’ also reflects the power battle between different government organisations. Passages like ‘and make decisions that are compulsory’ and ‘decisions should be enforced on those organisations by stakeholders who are represented in the council’ make clear the top-down

and even authoritarian nature of this proposal. There is no hint of either representative or direct democracy here: stakeholders appear to be plucked out of the ether and given power to make decisions.

5.10 Stakeholder Consultation vs Stakeholder Decision-Making

Participants also had strong views on the level or extent of participation that different stakeholders should have in tourism planning. The suggestion for a Higher Authority or Council for Tourism in the previous section for engaging with different stakeholders clearly conferred decision-making authority on stakeholders. However, despite their criticisms of government decisions as seen in section 5.5.3, the majority of respondents held that stakeholder participation should be organised for consultation purposes only; decision-making should be exercised only by the government. This view emphasises the importance of getting ideas and recommendations from different stakeholders, but actual planning or decision-making would be carried out by the authorised decision makers i.e., a government body.

As KI-D28 (GO) put it: *“When you have different views from different stakeholders, it will be more than excellent. But the planning should be done by one organisation”*. Similarly, KI-M1 (PVS) said, *“A’shura Council seeks people’s views and then makes decisions at the Ministry level”*. Likewise, KI-M6 (MS) stated, *“They should participate but at the end the decision should be for the MoT”*. And KI-M18 (NGO) *“I think more to give feedback, give some information and provide guidance, I do not think necessarily as decision makers”*. KI-M14 (TA) when asked about the extent that stakeholders should participate, responded, *“I mean we can only give recommendations”*. KI-M23 (TA) agreed, stating that *“Colleges and universities roles are to offer advice, consultancy, and structured planning, but not to make the decisions and implement them”*. KI-M10 (PVS) had similar comments about private sector participation:

*“It will help in making the decision. I am not saying that the stakeholders [should] make the decisions. You have **the government who decides** the regulation, but before making the regulation, ask the private sector what their challenge is and ask the private sector about what the government is intending to do if it works or not”*.

The views of these respondents show that stakeholders do not want to be empowered to make decisions: they only want their views and challenges to be considered, and for the government

to take decisions. This is because they believed involving local stakeholders in decision-making would be to invite deadlock. Consider the following excerpts:

KI-M3 (LCM):

“Oman should continue the same situation where the government makes the decisions, but it should consult all the sectors through discussions. Because, if we try to spread the decision-making authority and give it to local people, we will not do anything”.

KI-M6 (MS) was particularly concerned that stakeholder participation should not result in stakeholders selfishly vetoing tourist development *“Of course, it is important to involve them, listen to them and take their views. But take what will help you to progress with development and not the things that will go against project developments”*. Several participants spoke of the need for stakeholders to seek consensus to enable better decisions. For example, KI-M13 (PFI) said it was important *“to create consensus among stakeholders even if there are clashing interests. You must create a mechanism for it”*. The view that stakeholders must be willing to compromise in order to reach consensus and that the public interest was to be considered first and foremost was put forward by KI-M6 (MS):

“To sit at one table and discuss, consensus-making is also a must. Not to stick to one’s own view...the people should be willing to make concessions and accept [others’ viewpoints] to get things done. At the end it is in the public interest. We must put public interest above individual interests”.

The recurring theme in the above excerpts is the importance of consultation with all stakeholders, hopefully to reach consensus among stakeholders, while the final decisions are taken by the government. Participants from all stakeholder groups suggest consultation with the wider stakeholders’ groups is the desired level of participation, not involvement at the level of decision-making. This level of participation - i.e., taking input from different stakeholders - seems to be what was practised in the development of OTS 2040. These participants are very clear that decision-making authority must remain with a government organisation such as the MoT or higher. Those arguing for consensus in decision making noted the importance of compromise among stakeholders and held that the public interest must prevail over individual interests.

5.11 Conclusion

This chapter presents the findings from the key interviews with 45 participants representing different tourism stakeholders from Muscat and Dhofar governorates in Oman. The interview findings provide information about the challenges and weaknesses within the current tourism planning system in the country. The main weakness as perceived by all stakeholders is a lack of clear direction and appropriate planning for the tourism sector. This may in large part be due to a lack of relevant expertise in planning by government officials in ministries such as MoT. Other key reasons include the lack of power of MoT to take final decisions regarding tourism planning, because such decision-making power is vested in bodies such as the Ministerial Council and the Supreme Planning Committee. Furthermore, several government ministries and organisations are involved in various aspects of tourism development and this significantly impacts the success of tourism planning and development. The MoT lacks the authority or power to coordinate or control the process as a result of which, decision-making is fragmented and ineffective with long bureaucratic delays. The lack of adequate government and private sector funding for tourism projects are further deficiencies mentioned by stakeholders.

All stakeholder groups are aware of the issues in tourism planning, and they show a very good level of understanding of the benefits and risks associated with tourism development. They are positive about the potential benefits, though, the representatives of the wider community expressed disappointment that they are yet to see or share in these economic benefits. All stakeholders confirmed that the MoT does engage with a wider body of stakeholders to get their views and input, but they noted that decisions are taken much later and do not adequately reflect the input provided. Stakeholders expressed strong interest in being engaged with the tourism planning process though for varying reasons. Many participants said that the further development of Oman is an important motivator for them to support the planning process as best as they can.

The process of preparing OTS 2040 was used by many MoT officials and some of the private sector and academic stakeholders as an example of wider stakeholder participation in the planning process. The OTS 2040 was considered by MoT officials as representing ‘everyone’s’ views and an effective solution in addressing the lack of direction and plans for the future. However, while participants from the private sector and academia perceived their own participation as satisfactory, government organisations, regional bodies, small and

medium enterprises, and local community representatives stated they were not involved in the planning process but were merely presented with some of the outcomes.

A significant finding from the KI interviews is that the MoT selects stakeholders based on their perception of 'expertise'; hence smaller organisations, regional government bodies and the wider community are not engaged as they are perceived as lacking the awareness or expertise required. This leads to further fragmentation in decisions as well as conflicts and issues among stakeholders at the local or regional level. Expert power represented by consultants is perceived by many participants as the best way to address the lack of expertise in planning. However, the fact that such experts are unduly influenced and controlled by the government and lack local knowledge can make their contribution less valuable.

Most importantly while most stakeholders wanted to be more involved in the planning process by providing their input at the outset, the consensus was that decision-making is the responsibility of the government. However, there was a widespread feeling that the government machinery for tourism policy making was fragmented and sclerotic. The solution for the fragmented decision-making and delays was seen by several participants to be more effective engagement of all stakeholders including all the different government bodies under the supervision of an authority with real decision-making power. Such an authority would have to be at a level higher than the MoT and should have the power to ensure effective planning and implementation of tourism policy through effective coordination with the multiple government organisations.

Chapter 6. Results of Focus Group Discussions

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a discourse analysis of the six focus groups discussions (FGD) and six interviews that were conducted in the second stage of primary data collection. After the KI interviews, the researcher constructed two illustrations reflecting two variations of the tourism planning process. The first illustration reflected the planning process that was followed in engaging stakeholders during the preparation of OTS 2040. This illustration was based on the understanding gained through the critical discourse analysis of OTS 2040 and the KI interview transcripts. The second illustration integrates the overall perceptions of KI interviewees on strengthening stakeholder participation into the different stages of planning and stakeholder participation found in the literature review. The two illustrations were presented to stakeholders in the FGDs and subsequent interviews to obtain their feedback on the perceived strengths and weaknesses of each of the two illustrations as well as recommendations for improving the planning process. It was felt that depicting the planning process pictorially as illustrations, would enable participants to better understand the differences in the processes and stakeholder roles in tourism planning in Oman. The focus groups and interviewees were presented with the two illustrations as Process I and Process II, without any further attributions and they were asked for their views on both.

Six FGDs were conducted with different stakeholders and separate one-to-one interviews were conducted with five government officials as they could not all meet at the same time for a FGD. One more interview was conducted with a Municipal Council from Dhofar. Each focus group was made up of four participants from the same stakeholder category. The first focus group (FGD1) was with senior management staff of different nationalities including Omanis from 3-, 4- and 5-star private sector hotels. The second focus group (FGD2) comprised Omani freelance tour guides. The third (FGD3) and fourth (FGD4) were conducted with two local Omani communities' members who are active members of their villages. The fifth FGD (FGD5) was with members of the media which included an owner and CEO of a local magazine and an owner and CEO of a media, public relations, and marketing company, both of whom are active and well-known writers of tourism-related issues in local newspapers. The other two participants were journalists who write about tourism, social and economic issues in Omani Arabic newspapers. The last focus group was made up of four tourism academics, who teach on undergraduate tourism programmes in

Oman. The one-to-one interviews replacing the planned FGD with government officials was conducted with 3 senior officials from MoT, one senior official from MoE, and a senior official from Dhofar Municipality. The final interview was with a member from the Municipal Council in Dhofar. The next section presents the views of the focus group and interview participants on the two processes and their recommendations for further improving stakeholder participation and effectiveness of the tourism planning process.

6.2 Process I

Figure 7 illustrates the process followed in the preparation of OTS 2040 and was constructed from the information obtained from the KI interviews and documentary analysis. It shows how the different stakeholders were engaged in the planning process but does not indicate how the plans will be implemented. The oval shape in the centre reflects the major role played by consultants in the planning process: the consultants interacted with different local stakeholders identified and organised by MoT to obtain their input for OTS 2040. The boxes on the left and right represent the different stakeholders who engaged with the process and their roles. The one-way arrows indicate the flow of the process, while the arrows between the consultants in the centre and the other stakeholders indicate the two-way communication between the parties.

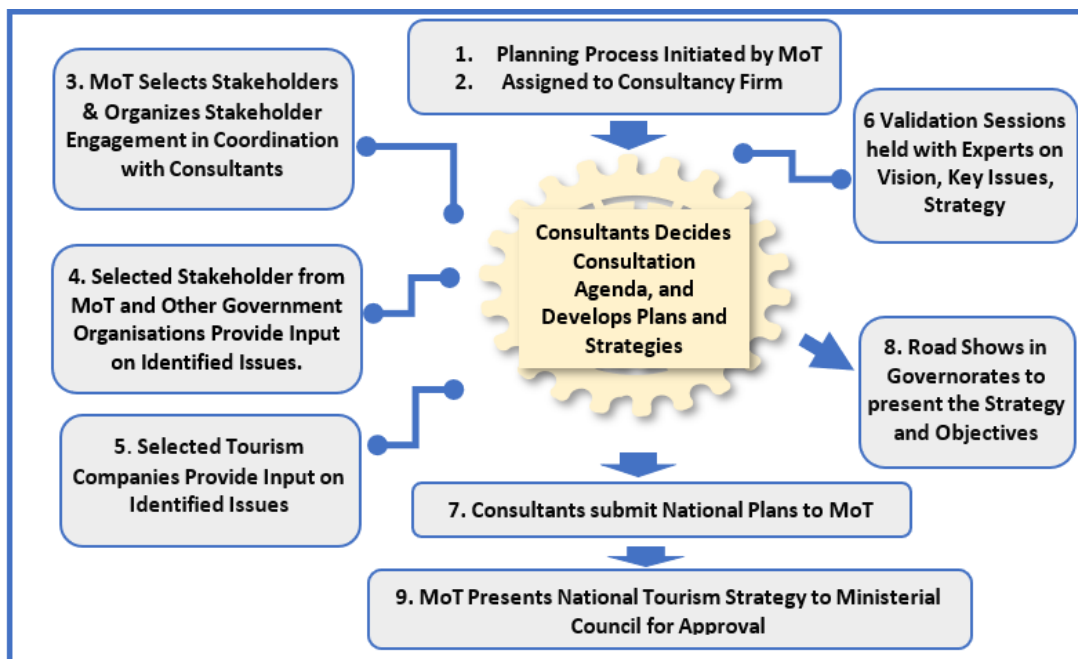
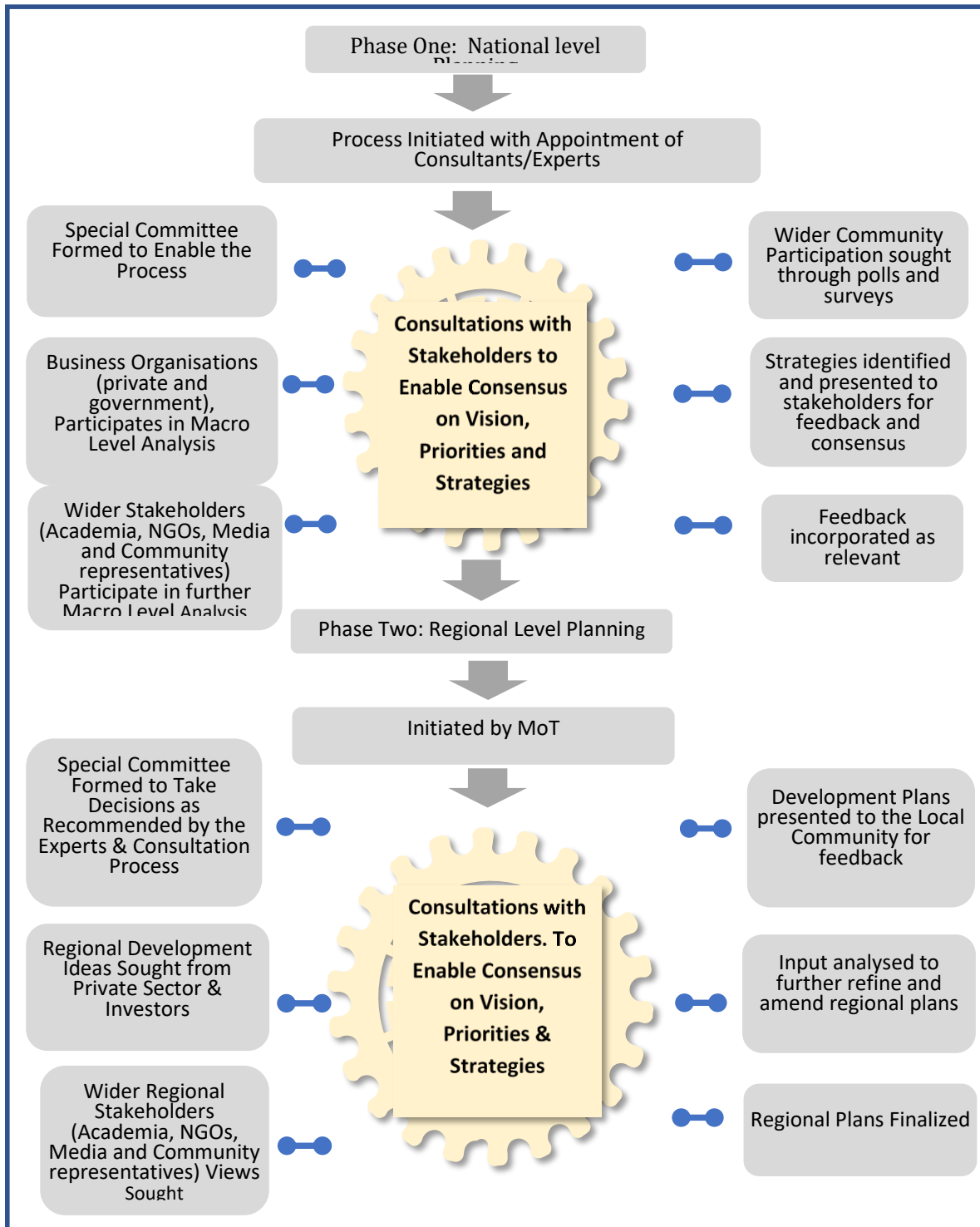


Figure 7: Process I: Planning and stakeholders engagement process for OTS 2040

6.3 Process II

Process II was constructed based on the findings from KI interviews that participants prefer a higher level of stakeholder engagement and is integrated with elements from the literature on tourism planning. Process II is divided into four stages with the roles of each stakeholder identified at each stage. Different stakeholders have different roles to play in successive stages. In the illustration (Figure 8) the oval shape in the center reflects the importance of consultation between stakeholders, indicating that this consultation should be the basis for planning. All categories of stakeholders of tourism planning in Oman are represented in the boxes with their expected roles. The two-way arrows between the oval shape in the centre and the stakeholders indicate two-way communication.



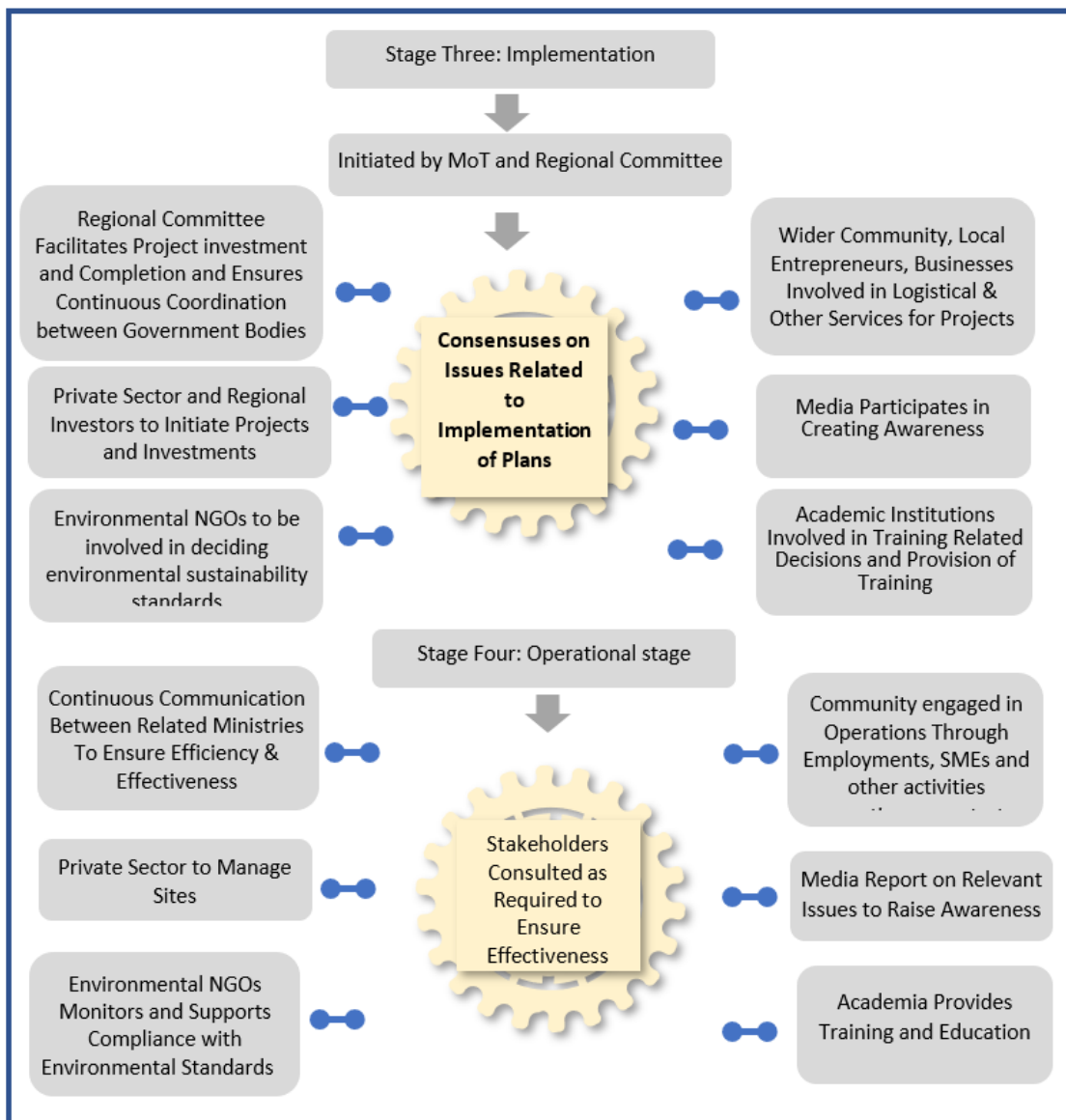


Figure 8: Tourism planning process II

6.4 Recognition of Process I

Although there were no headings, labels or other identifiers relating to OTS 2040 included in Process I, many participants recognised it as representing the existing system of tourism planning in Oman. The recurrence of words such as ‘*closer*’, ‘*current*’, ‘*close*’, ‘*now*’, ‘*our reality*’, ‘*similar*’, ‘*was applied*’, ‘*already used*’, ‘*current actions*’ in the following excerpts reveal the participants familiarity with the depicted planning process.

According to FGD1-1 (LCM), a local community participant, “*the first process is closer to the current situation in Oman*”. Similar comments were expressed by others such as FGD5-

2 (MS): “This is **close to** what we have now in Oman”; FGD5-1 (MS): “...*the first process is our reality with all of its details*”. Moreover, the mocking tone of voice in which the participant pronounced the words ‘*reality with all of its details*’ reveals a level of frustration with the current process and possibly the lack of stakeholder participation in it.

FGD3-1 (PVS) a tour guide stated: “*I find the first process to be **more similar** to what is happening now here in Oman... Most of the projects are run this way*”. Respondents also noted that the leading role of consultants in Process I reflected the part played by the Spanish consultancy company THR, in drafting OTS 2040 - as seen in the following excerpt by FGD5-2, (MS):

*“The first process was applied during the OTS 2040. **The MoT used** this process, **they appointed** a consultancy company to prepare the broad lines for them. **The company visited** the regions and the willayats, met the people, to see what was needed as a way of society participation to know what they want”.*

As FGD6-1 (TA) enquired “*Process number one is **already** used by the Spanish company, is this correct?*”. FGD6-2 (TA) who had participated in the process of developing OTS 2040, confirmed that this is ‘*actually*’ so: “*Yes...this is **actually** what the MoT did after it selected the consultancy company to work with*”. FGD4-4 (PVS), a remarked that Process I showed how the MoT used the consultancy company to match the vision to the strategy:

*“It is actually a great process that expresses the **current** actions **taken by MoT** by facilitating or by having a third party in order to ensure that the tourism vision and the strategy are in line with the vision itself”.*

So, the process depicted in the first illustration was identified by many participants as the approach followed for developing OTS 2040 and hence it is Oman’s current tourism planning approach. Moreover, the words ‘*the MoT used it*’, ‘*they appointed*’, ‘*the company visited*’, ‘*action taken by the MoT*’, in the above excerpts, implies a one-way process flow that is initiated and controlled by the MoT and facilitated with the help of consultants.

6.5 Top-Down Hierarchy

Many community representatives referred to the government authoritarianism inherent in Process I. Their views reflected the lack of involvement of the wider community in the

planning process. The use of negative intonations such as ‘*just presented*’, ‘*impose*’, ‘*whether accepted or not*’, reveals participants’ strong reservations when they are merely presented or informed of plans rather than being included in a two-way participative process FGD2-2 (LCM), noted that Process I exemplified the top-down approach to tourism planning: “*In the first process the local community is just presented with what is to be done whether you accept it or not*”. Likewise, FGD2-1 (LCM) said, “*the first process imposes things on us without us being able to say something. There are no rules [protocols] about this*”. The inference from both these excerpts is that the top-down approach to planning where stakeholders especially the local community cannot do anything but accept what is being done is not acceptable. This implies that stakeholders especially at the community level want a higher level of involvement where their views are considered by the decision makers. The sentence ‘*there are no rules [protocols] about this*’ refers to the lack of clarity and transparency to the process and therefore no one knows the rules.

In another community, the lack of local stakeholder or community consultation on tourism projects was commented on using similar negative intonations in the discourse, such as, ‘*authoritarian individuals*’. FGD2-1 (LCM) describes how top-down decision-making in planning without local community involvement has harmed the interests of local people:

“*.... projects have been built on the seaside such as the Blue City, the Wave Project and others. The local citizens are...suffering from the development of these projects as they do not have any conserved land in their areas...another example is the coastal road in Barka.*

They said that they want to build this road for tourism and promised local citizens reimbursement for taking their land. Now after many years the road is not finished, and many people have not yet been reimbursed. Also, in Bowsher and Alkuwhair, local people who used 100% of the beaches today do not even get 20% of the beaches to enjoy any more here. We used to go all the way from Al Qurm to Al Ghubrah on the beaches but now in many of these places you cannot even go near them. There are embassies and ministries.

These are not hotels to be located on the beaches. So here you find authoritarian individuals having the power”.

The above excerpt also shows how the lack of local community involvement works against local people interests, e.g., ‘*suffering*’, ‘*do not even get*’, ‘*have not yet been*’. Moreover, in Oman for any owner to give up or lose their land for any development project, he needs to be ‘*reimbursed for taking their land*’ by either giving them another piece of land or paying

them market value of the land. But in these cases, the respondent is saying they had not been reimbursed. Therefore, such incidents have the potential to create conflicts between locals and tourism businesses or tourists. In relation to another local community village, FGD1-1 (LCM) emphasised that his local community has never been consulted or informed about any project at any time and implied that people wanted to be informed of how they can benefit from projects in their area:

“Now I do not remember that anyone has consulted us. For example, we have here in our village a conservation [project, but] nobody came to consult with this local community. We were not told how we were going to benefit from this conservation [project], and it is the most remarkable project in this area. I do not recall that we have been consulted on any project”.

FGD2-2 (LCM) pointed out that in Process I, the government shared tourism planning decision-making only with an elite group of stakeholders which included consultants, experts, and some of the larger private companies. The repeated negative inflections (in bold) in his discourse, together with the use of modal words, reveals his criticism of the exclusion of some stakeholders while attributing a low level of importance to those who did participate.

*“The media organisations **did not** take part in the planning while **they should** be an integral part of the system. The NGOs **do not** participate. Who then participated? It is **just** the government, the consultancy company and the big companies! ... And **not all** government organisations are participating which means that there are other government organisations ignored in this issue”.*

Moreover, FGD2-2 (LCM) felt that most of the companies who did participate were mere puppets of the government, not independent experts on tourism, so in the end, decisions are made wholly by governmental stakeholders:

*“...the first process has existed here in Oman for a long time, since when they started thinking about opening tourism in Oman. And now many tourism companies have sprung up, e.g., Assyad and Omran. However, these are government companies; I call these companies’ the daughters of the Ministries; instead of calling them Ministries they called them companies. The boards of directors of these companies are headed by the Ministers who have the **absolute power to do everything**. So, in the end, what the government wants will still be imposed through these companies”.*

This excerpt shows the government extending its power through the companies which are then able to go ahead with development against local opinion: ‘*absolute power to do everything*’ while locals are helpless and marginalised. The implication here is that some of these projects may be against the interests of local people, but the locals are helpless against such projects and hence, marginalised.

FGD1-1 (LCM) further noted that the type of consultation as depicted in Process I which is mainly with the private sector without wider inclusion, can create opportunities for companies to manipulate decision-making for their own interests.

“I am a bit cautious about the private sector companies as sometimes they care for their own interests and do not care about the others. So, for example, in the first process this can happen a lot because there is less consultation”.

FGD3-3 (PVS) for more involvement by smaller companies in the planning process as currently there is monopoly by the bigger players, and this leads to distortions or imbalance in tourism planning and development. The participant used modal words to describe how involvement of smaller companies can be a win-win situation:

*“we **should** include the small companies as well. Because the big companies are monopolising. And if they are participating in the plans then they **would** make it according to their requirements. For example, big companies can attract premium level tourists. While small companies **may be able** to attract other types such as adventurers and others that are not the focus of bigger companies. So big companies might push to give priority for building resorts and may not push for preparing areas for example for hiking”.*

The above excerpt shows that the power enjoyed by bigger companies leads to power imbalance as the big companies can influence decisions ‘*according to their requirements*’. By including the small players in the dialogue, all perspectives can be considered. Almost all of the above excerpts reveal participants’ concerns about the imbalance in stakeholder power to influence decision-making in their favour which may not be in the interests of those who have less power.

6.6 Stakeholder Inclusiveness

There was a marked preference by FGD participants for Process II over Process I as they felt Process II provided for more inclusive stakeholder participation. The recurring positive inflections in the following excerpts (in bold) such as ‘*more*’, ‘*wider*’, ‘*present*’ reveal their positive emphasis on ‘*participation*’, ‘*partnership*’, ‘*consultation*’, ‘*public interest*’, ‘*inclusiveness*’.

FGD5-1 (MS) said, “*The second process gives more **partnership** and also you do not implement something without stakeholders’ knowledge. Yes, I agree with the second process because it has **wider participation**”.* Similarly, FGD1-1 (LCM) remarked:

*“In the second process there **is consultation**. We think that consultation is in the public interest. For sure when you consult you will know the advantages and the disadvantages. So, from my point of view I prefer the second process”.*

Many FGD participants preferred Process II as it gave more weight to the local community as stakeholders than did Process I. As noted by FGD2-2 (LCM):

*“A local community can give its views on issues because it is benefiting by providing logistic support at the third stage and finally getting job opportunities. I see the second process as the **better** one and the more **inclusive** one... In the second process the local community **is present** at all stages”.*

The inclusion of local communities’ opinions and interests in tourism plans was also why FGD1-2 (LCM) preferred Process II:

*“... the second process is **better**, the people have a chance to give their opinion on what is positive and negative, so we get peoples’ interests moving, whereas in the first model, stakeholders give their views whether others like it or not, whether local communities benefit from it or not. So, I do not think the first one is good”.*

However, others such as FGD5-3 (MS) were critical of the extensive stakeholder involvement in Process II as they felt it would lead to pointless discussions without leading to any consensus: “*Why I am opening this issue is because you know the society here in Oman. If you follow the second process you will be lost. Each one would say his view and then go and sleep*”. FGD5-3 (MS) was implying that discussions or consultations with wider stakeholders such as public representatives in Oman are normally not fruitful nor leads to

consensus, thereby wasting time without any outcomes. Further criticisms of the extensive stakeholder engagement in Process II included irreconcilable conflicts in stakeholders' perceptions; more importance given to some stakeholders' views than others; and the chance of local communities or the wider public refusing to accept new ideas or projects. For instance, according to FGD3 (PVS): *“There is going to be a lot of clashes of views”* and FGD2-1 (LCM) noted that many *“normal”* people (i.e., the public) would put their own interests before the public interest:

*“Sometimes if you consult **normal** individuals, they would think of their **own interest not the public interest**...maybe 40% will say that this will have a negative impact on them and they would say we do not want it...we are now living happily with our children and our culture...if you have 60% agreement and 40% do not agree, you would impose it on us!”*.

The above excerpt by FGD2-1 (LCM) states that what a local community perceives as its own interests may be contrary to the public interest (or the economic interests of Oman) and even if it is only a minority of the local community who are not in agreement, they will cause conflicts. The view that the local people may not be sympathetic to tourism development projects and so it is all right to not involve them as they are not that important, was also echoed by FGD3-3 (PVS): *“Local people **may** oppose, and tourism projects **may** be stopped. Projects worth millions **could** be stopped because of people’s views. These people **may** not be important”*. The use of words ‘*may*’ or ‘*could*’ implies that the speaker is not really sure but is hypothesising the outcomes. Nevertheless, the speaker implies that economic growth via tourism is in the public or national interest while the average person tends to be aligned to their own self-interest. The critics express concern that the average Omani citizen particularly within a local community context may not agree with tourism plans and projects if they are consulted because they are misinformed or are unaware. When FGD3-3 says, *“these people may not be important”*, he may be taken to mean that they are not fully aware of, or even interested in, potential benefits to the economy and therefore their opinions may be discounted.

This negative view about the wider public in Oman is also expressed by FGD5-3 (MS) who says that decision makers do not understand Omani public or society as it is not easy to understand them (consider words in bold) *“It’s good for a society that the decisions makers know what they are doing. You know **how the Omani society is**, sometimes you **even find officials that do not understand** what people want from him”*.

All the above excerpts on local community participation reflect a gulf between the opinion of the local community and the views of the government or the other stakeholders regarding tourism development. This corresponds to the KI interview findings that the local community does not see or experience any of the benefits from tourism. However, as suggested by FGD5-3 (MS), FGD2-1(LCM) and FGD3-3 (PVS), continued exclusion or participation from the process may merely strengthen this alienation while more inclusion as preferred by FGD2-2 (LCM), FGD1-2 (LCM) and others can lead to more positive outcomes in the longer term. Even those local community participants, who stated that shorter decision-making processes were better, and that local community participation can take a long time, when asked to decide which one of the processes would they like to be used in constructing or a project in their village, said they preferred Process II. The two private sector focus groups also felt it is important to raise local people's awareness about the benefits of tourism.

The participation by the media in Process II at all stages was considered to be very positive. Participants agreed that the media has an important role in supporting tourism planning, and that raising awareness of tourism's importance will directly help to reduce resistance and lack of involvement from the local communities. As noted by FGD6-2 (LCM), the media should play a strong role in raising societal and community awareness so that the local community can be better engaged (words in bold stress the importance of awareness by the general public):

*“the media organisations are a strong part of a development programme or introducing a new sector to the society. Because **if the society is not aware then it will not be involved in the sector.** Many sectors in Oman had strategies that local communities **did not know about...** So, they **did not get involved** in them, and **did not take part** in [planning] and this **became a problem.** One of these sectors is actually the tourism sector”.*

KI2-1 (GO) said there was a need for the media to play a strong role in raising awareness of the benefits of tourism development in local communities. His use of the words ‘*it does not mean only the traditional media*’ (below) implies that he is referring to more contemporary communication forms such as digital social media platforms to communicate directly with specific communities.

*“When we talk about the media it does not mean only the **traditional media.** There need to be a direct communication with targeted local community, e.g., if we want to have a project*

in a village X then we do not need to include the nearby village Y. If the project is in one region the media should not broadcast to the whole country because that might not concern other regions. Instead, they should focus on that region's local community”.

The media was expected to help in protecting local interests by raising awareness of unsustainable practices that occur. FGD2-1 (LCM) gave an example of the media's role in protecting public property by raising awareness of the problems involved. He implies that media participation can confront or address the power enjoyed by the big companies and he used as an example Bowsheer village sand dune, which was sanctuary for the local people:

*“There was the issue of Bowsheer sands. companies were taking away the sand until the media raised and escalated the issue. They [companies] had taken a large part of the sand dunes and the local people were not happy about it. If the media **had not escalated** the issue, there **would not have been any** sand dunes left in this area”.*

However, the role of the media as an important stakeholder in promotion and marketing tourism (as depicted in the last stage in Process II) was noted by FGD4-4 (PVS):

“We cannot go and market the destination ourselves, so we need the government support and media.... so we need experienced media representative offices, PR, sales to reach the target audience in feeder markets to make the process shorter than it takes if we target them directly”.

In summary, most participants felt that the more inclusive and participative stakeholder engagement suggested at the different stages in Process II is an improvement on Process I. Many felt that the inclusion of the wider community and media at all stages would lead to better outcomes, because they are able to balance the power between companies and local communities.

6.7 The Central Role of Consultants in Planning

As in the findings from the KI interviews, the FGDs revealed differing opinions on the central role given to consultants as the experts in Process I. On the one hand, there was strong support for using consultants to lead the development of plans as illustrated in Process I. Respondents referred to the planning skills and international tourism expertise that consultants bring which government officials in Oman lack. For instance, FGD5-4 (MS), a media stakeholder,

emphasised the international exposure of such consultants: “... *a consultancy company would have international experience and have a clear vision for tourism*”. FGD3 (PVS), an entrepreneur, was very clear in his preference for Process I: “*because it has the consultancy company; it collects the views [from other stakeholders] and at the end the [consultancy] company’s views will prevail*”. Similarly, FGD1-1 (LCM), a local community member, emphasised that while consultants may prioritise to economic benefits, their experience is too valuable to do without: “...*So, the advantage of the first process is that the consultant company has experience, and it will give its view which is better, but it might give more weight to the economic benefits*”.

FGD2-2 (LCM) also asserted that consultants bring to the table models of what works elsewhere, “*like Thailand or Malaysia and Singapore*” and these can be applied to Oman, after “*making them compatible with our culture*”. This ensures that Oman does not start from scratch but learns from the experiences of other countries: “*we should not start from scratch but.... start at a point whether others have reached*”. He is stressing that Oman cannot rely on local expertise. By comparing Oman to tourism destinations like ‘*Thailand or Malaysia and Singapore*’, the inference is that these developing countries have expanded their tourism potential significantly and that Oman could benefit through consultants who transfer knowledge of these successful strategies to the case of Oman.

Another argument for using consultants, was that they speed up the process by cutting short the time spent on stakeholder consultation as in Process I in comparison to Process II. As FGD1-3 (LCM) noted: “*If the government wants to do a **fast** project it is better to give it to a consultancy company, it has the knowledge and it will short cut all of these stages*”. The implication here is that the knowledge and expert power of consultants far outweigh the contribution of all other stakeholders. Similar views on expediency were expressed by FGD1-2 (LCM) who noted that the first process “*is **faster** to implement*”. Similarly, FGD5-3 (MS) noted that consultants were faster because they reduced bureaucracy “*There is **less** [red tape] because you only have the MoT and the consultancy company to plan things*”. The selection of words like ‘*fast, short cut*’ reflects the positive perception of expert-led decision-making processes.

Process II was criticised for downplaying the role of consultants. FGD5-4 (PVS) argued that the role of consultants should be strengthened in Process II, using words such as ‘*must*’, ‘*should be*’, ‘*recommend*’:

*“The consultancy company is a **must**...The role of the consultancy company **should** be made stronger in the second Process I...I **recommend** that the consultancy company have a stronger role in the second Process...the first Process’ advantage is that it has a stronger role for consultancy companies while in the second their voice is not heard”.*

FGD6-1 (TA) also criticised Process II that although it initiated the planning process through consultants (like Process I), unlike Process I, it did not have a clear or core role for them:

“... if I [MoT] have appointed a consultancy company and paid a million OMR and worked for 2 or 3 years. The consultancy company coordinates between the local community, the media organisations, the hotels, the ministries, companies and the MoT. The consultancy company in Process I has a role. In Process II, the government initiated the process and appointed a consultancy company, but the consultancy company is not shown as core in the model”.

On the other hand, there was also criticism for using consultants in planning. Similar to findings from the KI interviews. FGD5-4 (PVS) stressed that consultants cannot or do not seek community opinions and FGD5-3 (MS) expressed the worry that foreign consultants will produce plans that are not appropriate for Oman: *“if you have a consultancy company that does not understand our society then it could make you copies of plans that are not suitable for the society”.* The inference here is that international consultancies because of how they work and their lack of deeper knowledge of Oman can reproduce previously prepared plans for other countries to be applied to Oman without adequate local contextualisation. Similar sentiments were expressed by FGD5-2 (MS) who felt that consultants should be on tap to provide advice for strategy building but not on top to develop the strategy itself:

“...the consultancy company’s role is not to make the strategy but to help us make our [own] strategy. But if they make the strategy for us what will happen is that the company will get you a duplicate copy from another strategy that is not suitable for you. For example, we see some projects that were proposed by consultancy companies that did not work, e.g., Al Inshirah Restaurant and in Wadi bani Khalid; they failed”.

This excerpt links lack of understanding of relevant local issues by consultants to the failure of projects. With the example of the ‘Al Inshirah Restaurant’ even though it is a relatively small project, the participant is bringing attention to the fact that the restaurant project was

proposed by a foreign developer or consultant who recommended the particular location due to the spectacular views of the mountains and the seaside. However, they ignored or underestimated the importance of its proximity to very conservative local communities who objected to the restaurant serving alcohol. Moreover, they did not consider that tourists spend very little time if at all in that area, and as a result, the restaurant failed, and it was later demolished.

In summary, the majority consensus among FGD participants is that the role of consultants is crucial to planning tourism in Oman or at least until local officials gain the required level of expertise. In order to address problems such as the lack of adequate contextualization and relevance to Oman in the plans produced by international consultants. One of the solutions suggested was that the selected consultants should have some local (i.e., Omani) experience as well. As FGD1-3 (LCM) suggests, *“when bringing in consultants, it should be a mix of local and international experience; so, this company should meet these requirements”*.

Another suggestion was that the scope of the consultant’s work must be prepared in a way that local issues are not ignored, and that international experience is customised to address the local issues adequately. As FGD6-2 (TA) suggests *“the consultancy company must have guidelines or a road map that they follow... So [that it] does not make us a copy and paste plan from another country that it did somewhere else”*. Copy and paste here refers to the frequently used function in Microsoft word, thus implying again that plans must adequately meet all requirements of the contexts in which they are to be implemented.

6.8 Length of the Planning Process

In contrast to Process I, Process II was criticised for its excessive length. As Process I only reflected the preparation of national level plans and did not include implementation, it was considerably shorter. Process II was longer, as it included three different levels of planning which were presented sequentially: national level planning (stage 1), regional planning (stage 2) and implementation or local level planning (stage 3). As FGD6-2 (TA) noted:

“I find process number one as closer to tourism planning process and not for the tourism development stages. The second process is for all tourism development stages such as planning, development, operation, and assessment and ends with sustainability”.

The discursive analysis of excerpts by participants who state that Process II is too long, shows that what they are really concerned about is the delay in implementation of plans once plans are prepared. Consider the excerpts below which state that Process II is long and their reasons for saying this.

FGD-2-1(LCM) said delays discourage the private sector from investing in tourism projects:

“The second process is long. Until you finish it you might lose the serious investor. He would say why should I wait for you for e.g., for three years to finish and get your planning and licenses ready! An investor would think that he would go somewhere else to invest rather than waiting”.

In the above excerpt, the participant’s statement that ‘until you finish it (i.e., implementation of the project) you might lose the serious investor’, shows that he is referring to local level planning and the timeframe involved in project planning and its implementation. The excerpt also reflects concerns about the government’s inability to attract investors due to the delays in the licensing process in implementing projects.

Due to similar concerns, FGD2-1 (LCM) proposed reducing the time frame taken to reach implementation by combining stages 1 and 2 although they are 2 different plans, so that the implementation stage would be faster: *“It [process II] is better [than process I] but the stages need to be cut short. Consultation and engagement of all stakeholders is needed but ...the first and the second stages can be combined together”.* Similarly, FGD5-4 (MS), also suggested combining the first and second stages and cutting out referral to the Ministerial Council:

“The second model is very long and the first and second stages could be combined in one stage. So, when you set out the vision you also set out how you are going to implement the vision”.

This above discourse also implies that the MoT should have the power to proceed and take decisions regarding its plans, if those plans are aligned to the government’s overall direction and objectives. Hence concerns about length of the process, were expressed in terms of the overall delay in project implementation, as noted by FGD5-3 (MS) *“there will be a lot of bureaucratic delays”.* Therefore, as in the KI findings, participants wanted solutions for the

long delays in projects at the implementation stage in a way that does not add to the current issues.

Several participants however were quite supportive of the longer time projected by Process II and prioritised the importance of stakeholder participation over speed of decision-making even at project (i.e. implementation level). FGD1-1(LCM) argued that long consultative processes are preferable to not having consultations:

*“I think it is better to delay but get all stakeholders to consult about advantages and disadvantages and agree on issues rather than not having consultations, and suddenly one day you wake up to see **a project** that you have no idea about”.*

FGD5-1 (MS) emphasised that consulting with relevant stakeholders is more important than speed. Consider the following excerpt which shows FGD5-1’s (MS) emphasis on consultation, as revealed through the comparative use of ‘*still better to consult*’ after “*you waste your time on consultations with people who have no views*’. The excerpt also explicitly indicates that there are significant concerns at the project implementation stage with projects being cancelled due to resistance from local communities.

*“Of course, it takes more time because of consultations...and sometimes **you waste your time** in consultation with people who have no views...**But it is still better** to consult them rather than not consulting them. Because if you go to a region you cannot develop a project without consulting the local people. For example, the MoT wanted to build public toilets in Al Kasfa hot springs but could not do it because local people did not accept it”.*

Participants noted that the extensive community participation in Stages 2 and 3 in Process II will help to reduce community resistance by enabling local stakeholders to experience the benefits first-hand. As FGD2-2 (LCM) observed, in Process II “*local community is benefiting by providing logistic support in the third stage and finally gets job opportunities*”. KI2-3 (GO) noted that these logistic support services can be implemented in several ways so that the local community can participate:

“The local community can be asked to create a company [SME] or join as a partner with the main company. Employing larger numbers of the local community in the project...by buying their handicraft, and coordinating with local families to, for example, provide home

cooked dinners for guests. In this way I have involved the local community, ensured project success and offered different experiences for tourists”.

FGD1-1 was also supportive of local community companies who he felt should get priority for projects in their areas. FGD1-3 further suggested that companies investing in and benefiting from local projects could be asked to provide some services for the local community as part of their corporate social responsibility:

“We could have [in the past] asked the company that implements the project to provide some services for the village. For example, small football pitch for the village, small roads and lightings and jobs for our people so that they benefit from it”.

There was some input into what should be considered at the different stages of Process II. Some participants stressed the importance of understanding the target market and ensuring these are addressed in the first phase of Process II. The use of modal verb ‘*should*’, in the excerpt below implies the lack of clarity and clear direction at present in the tourism sector. According to FGD6-1 (TA) “*what we **should** be saying here [Stage 1] is setting vision, mission, the objectives, and the priorities such as targeted markets, targeted segments, e.g., Japanese, Chinese, Indians, whatever and local versus foreign investments*”. Similarly, FGD6-2 (TA) felt that it was necessary to set quantifiable performance indicators in Stage 1 – such as “*the growth rate needed; marketing indicators; the targeted segments*” - to objectively measure performance and outcomes. FGD4-1 (PVS) said that “*The government **should** do more for marketing Oman as a destination*” and that this should be emphasised.

So, while Process II laid out the different stages of planning, respondents wanted to ensure that the implementation of projects should not be delayed. These views reflected concerns that there would be delays between planning of projects and their actual implementation. This was a major concern of stakeholders as the process is too slow at present and they wanted the delays to be addressed effectively.

6.9 Legislation and Decision-Making Power

FGD participants pointed out several issues that required further consideration in both Process I and II. Participants pointed out that the planning process should give due importance to decision-making power when assigning responsibility for planning. The lack of power of the MoT in relation to the Supreme Planning Council and other ministries was

highlighted as a problem that impeded planning. FGD6-1 (TA) claimed that Process I was not clear about where the powers of the MoT ended, and the powers of the Ministerial Council began. Furthermore, the role of different government stakeholders was not clear in relation to planning:

“The main gap in Process number one is to specify the role of each stakeholder...and what he can do within the plan. In planning you cannot say, some, give their views, and make decisions. What kind of decisions? Because you say that the MoT makes decisions while at the end the Ministerial Council makes the decisions. There may be some decisions that the MoT takes during the planning phase, and there are limits on its decision-making authority. The higher decisions or the strategic decisions are made by the Ministerial Council. So, I should define the decisions, what are they? Temporary decisions, short-term decisions, mid-term or long-term decisions? For example, the decisions relating to building licenses or renewal of trade activity is under the MoT will not go higher to the Ministerial Council. So, the word ‘decision’ here must be defined to say what sort of decisions we are referring to”.

The inference here is that MoT has authority only for operational decisions such as ‘*building licenses or renewal of trade activity*’ as these decisions ‘*will not go higher to the Ministerial Council*’. It is therefore implied that the MoT lacks the authority to make strategic decisions regarding tourism planning. This implication is in line with the findings from the KI interviews that MoT lacks sufficient authority and power resulting in fragmented decision-making and delays.

Another source of confusion was ambiguity over which arm of government was responsible for land allocation decisions. KI2-1 (GO) noted that maps specifying the use of lands for the whole of Oman have been approved by the SCP. But the SCP leaves subsequent decisions on allocating land at project level to the “*implementing organisations*”, and this causes controversy. Hence focused stakeholder consultation and prompt decisions at the outset can address these issues. As noted by KI2-1 (GO), consultations between the MoT and MoE from the beginning could reduce conflicts with environmental stakeholders, implying the current lack of clarity and collaboration in objectives between the two ministries:

“If we know in advance what type of tourism projects are to be developed in an area. When I have this clear information, then I can give you the MoE approval in advance. Later on,

when looking at details of the projects there would be some conditions on how things should be. These conditions do not impact the projects. But in principle we can give the approvals in advance”.

FGD participants asserted the need for appropriate legislation or rules for planning and stakeholder participation so that the process and decision-making is effective and efficient. Some participants such as FGD5-1 (MS) noted the absence of legislative bodies from the stakeholder participation process in both models: *“I think you forgot to add to the model, the legislative organisations I mean A’shura Council and the State Council”*. They noted that current laws do not support stakeholder participation while all planning decisions irrespective of the sector or region are taken by the SPC or Ministerial Council and not by the relevant Ministry responsible for the sector. KI2-3 (GO) held it was very important to review the legislation governing the implementation of any plan (consider the words in bold below). As a government official he would be well aware of the systemic problems and his use of the phrase *“let me be frank”*, highlights his acknowledgement that legislative clarity is critical to the success of tourism planning and implementation.

*“Where is the legislation side? This is the **most** important thing. Because **any** investor who comes to Oman is confronted by the legislations and law and runs away. **Let me be frank.** The legislations and laws **must be revised** in order to make a good shift in tourism development”.*

Likewise, FGD6-2 (TA) and FGD 6-2 (TA) stressed the need for updating the legislative framework to deal properly with new decisions and plans. FGD6-2 (TA) said:

*“When we are introducing new programmes [plans], it will **also need** legislations and laws, so by the start of the strategy these laws and regulations **must be** in place. The regulator **must have** a place in making the strategy”.*

FGD6-2 (TA) further adds that without the appropriate revision of supporting legislation the plans (OTS 2040) would not be implemented by the concerned organisations:

*“... the tourism law **must be revised** during the OTS because you are going to introduce new things, and because these things have no laws. These new things could clash with the existing laws or it could create overlapping. For example, there was no legislation to oversee Heritage Homes in Oman; when this was introduced the Ministry of Heritage*

*refused to make adjustments to these buildings because the heritage law does not allow it. Therefore, we **must** get the legislators in the planning”.*

Further examples of some of these laws that must be revised or changed included the investment law, procedures and facilities for approvals, and licensing with the different government bodies. KI2-3(GO) stressed that licenses for projects need to be easier to obtain: “*what we need is more of **easing procedures and licensing**. Those who are in the mountains for example, let them build a small tent with tables, chairs and start a coffee shop*”. Similarly, FGD5-2 (MS) noted:

“... the MoT says that they look for investors but when investors come, they find hell of a lot of complications from all the ministries to get licenses and it takes years to get licenses. That is why many investors left Oman, because of the bureaucracy”.

The implication in the two excerpts above is that procedures for approving investments or licenses, whether for big investors or even local SMEs and entrepreneurs are not easy currently. The private sector focus groups also stressed the need to focus on issues that ease entrepreneurship and protect SMEs. Participants also emphasised the important role to be played by the legislators who need to be part of the process framework. FGD5-3 (MS) attributed this to the lack of government awareness or reflection about their own requirements resulting in too many unnecessary requirements that contains entrepreneurs and investors:

“The reason for it is because we [the government] do not know what we want. We announce about entrepreneurship and we want youth to start their business. But then they complicate them with so many requirements for licenses.... The government should allow people to start business from their homes without licenses and taxes until they are successful and then they can be asked to get licenses”.

The issue of Omanisation was also raised by the participants, who suggested that involving the Ministry of Manpower (MoMP) in the planning process could ease the problems involved. However, they felt the focus on Omanisation should be at the second stage not the first. KI2-5 (MCM) “*You start with consultation, then promoting Omanisation*”. FGD1-1 (LCM) noted “*if the Manpower is there it could help actually in agreeing on Omanisations level with other stakeholders at the second stage*”. Participants also felt the MoMP should be involved so that they understand the problems faced by tourism businesses in finding local employees: As FGD4-4 (PVS) said: “*Omanisations and recruitment for hotels should be*

from the local area because they stay with us. People we recruited from other regions quit their jobs with us because they wanted to be close to their homes". FGD4-3 (PVS) commented on the lack of Omanis with relevant skills in tourism as they mostly have *"engineering and other technical backgrounds that are not suitable for us as a hotel."* Hence, he said the MoMP should *"provide some special training from their side"* to ensure that adequately skilled Omani work force is available to achieve Omanisation targets. FGD4-1 (PVS) argued that the MoMP should work together with academic institutions to produce adequately skilled employees.

6.10 Conclusion

This chapter presented the views of FGD stakeholders on two processes of tourism planning with a particular focus on stakeholder participation in the planning process. The FGD participants and the interview participants (i.e., individual interviews conducted with participants unable to attend the FGDs) were given the illustrations of Process I (representing the current tourism planning process in Oman) and Process II (an augmented process of stakeholder participation reflecting different stages of planning including implementation and operations). The FGDs validated the findings of the KI interviews and the illustrations enabled stakeholders to easily identify the strengths and weaknesses of the two processes in relation to their appropriateness for Oman.

Several participants in all focus groups identified Process I as representative of the current system of tourism planning and stakeholder participation followed in Oman which was followed in preparing OTS 2040. The strength of Process I was that it, entrusted consultants with conducting the planning process, and thereby made use of international expertise and skills. According to stakeholders, this ensured that Oman does not have to start from scratch in planning but could gain from the lessons learned by other tourism destinations. Moreover, the process was shorter (in comparison to Process II which reflected different levels and stages of planning) and according to some, ensured that wider public and community participation did not delay implementation or negatively affect economic interests and development. However, there was strong criticism that Process I did not engage with stakeholders adequately and this would lead to problems in implementation and operations further on, including cancellation or delays of tourism projects. All focus groups agreed that, the solution was to engage more effectively with all stakeholders including the local community as in Process II.

Hence, the strength of Process II was that there was engagement with all stakeholders particularly the local community, media and SMEs and identified roles for each of them. The inclusion of the media as illustrated in Process II, in raising local community awareness and in enhancing outcomes and communication was noted positively by the participants. Process II, however, was criticised for being too long although it represented several stages including operationalization of the plans. The critical discourse analysis reveals that there was concern that it will lead to delays in the implementation of projects after plans are made and this would discourage investors and the private sector. These concerns are not about the levels of planning (i.e. national, regional, local) in Process II, but reflect the view that the time between the conceptual and the implementation stages must be as short as possible. Although some participants believed that local community participation at the implementation stage may not be important as they lack awareness, this view was not supported by most participants. The general consensus was that increased local community participation will reduce conflicts and resistance to tourism projects thus making most development efforts smoother and more successful. However, participants recommended that delays in implementation must be addressed in the planning and implementation process. The role of consultants in the process was to be enhanced so that their knowledge could be gainfully used in the planning process. The focus groups also strongly recommended more participation by different government organisations to fill gaps in decision-making power at all stages and to review the legislative framework aligned to the plans to ensure their implementation.

Chapter 7. Discussion and Proposal for An Integrated Framework for Tourism Planning and Stakeholder Participation

7.1 Introduction

This thesis has analysed planning documents and examined stakeholder discourse in order to understand the inherent weaknesses and challenges in the current system of tourism planning in Oman, which is the focus of research objective one. It has further examined stakeholder views and experiences in relation to inclusive and participative approaches to tourism planning, which is the focus of research objective two. These findings have been presented in chapters four and five. Illustrations of two planning processes were prepared and the feedback obtained from stakeholders on the strengths and weaknesses of each process, was presented in chapter six. This chapter discusses the key findings in relation to the three objectives of this study and also directly addresses the third research objective which is:

To develop an integrated framework for tourism planning and stakeholder participation for Oman that addresses identified weakness and strengthens sustainability.

This chapter also synthesises the findings of the study to draw relevant conclusions regarding the aim of this study which is to:

To examine critically the applicability of stakeholder participation in tourism planning efforts in a non-democratic and emerging tourism destination, namely, the Sultanate of Oman in order to strengthen sustainable tourism development.

In order to do this, the findings and evidence from this research study are synthesised and evaluated against the theoretical underpinnings and literature on tourism planning and development and stakeholder participation. In doing so, an integrated framework for tourism planning and stakeholder participation is proposed and included in this chapter.

7.2 Top-Down Planning Approach and Centralised Decision-Making

Emerging tourism destinations often do not have the experience of involving stakeholders in policy decisions (Sakitri, 2018; Van Nguyen et al. 2020) and this is certainly the case with Oman which is a monarchy and decisions historically have always been taken only by the government. The literature is also quite clear that planning and decision-making systems which are top-down may be less sympathetic to democratic based concepts such as stakeholder participation (Azeiteiro et al. 2012; Alshboul, 2016). This becomes even very difficult when more inclusive approaches to participation are considered, such as whether the public or non-state stakeholders are included in decision-making. Inclusiveness refers to the extent to which stakeholders can participate in decision-making (Dodds et al, 2010, Graci, 2013, Eskerod et al. 2015). The critical discourse analysis of the document analysis, KI interviews and FGDs in this study reveals that the tourism planning process in Oman is completely top-down with the government/state controlling the entire process from initiation to implementation. Some elements of democracy are ostensibly present in Oman's system of planning with the involvement of the A'shura Council and Municipal Councils in Oman Vision 2020 as both bodies are made up of elected members. However, the role they play in the planning process is not participatory and their involvement is towards the end of the process where outcomes are presented to these bodies; hence this makes their participation merely formal with decisions made solely by the government.

Nevertheless, there are, promising signs of increasing steps towards stakeholder involvement through consultations and discussions regarding tourism planning and development as seen with OTS 2040 document analysis. However, these steps are small. For example, the government as represented by the MoT controls the selection and extent of participation of all stakeholders as reflected in the discourse that the MoT '*selects*' stakeholders according to the '*topic*'. In OTS 2040, the larger tourism businesses from the public and private sectors and investors are considered as key stakeholders; this reflects the government's reliance or need for investment from these groups. The perception of company size i.e., larger or bigger companies are considered more important, and this is a key factor that influences stakeholder selection; the discourse reveals that the '*bigger players*' are equated with '*expertise*'. Hence, this gives these actors more power than all other stakeholder groups including smaller companies and SMEs. This is similar to the observation by several authors (Getz, 1986; Hall, 2005; Moscardo, 2011; Al Haija, 2011) that tourism planning in many countries confine

decision-making power to governments and powerful private interests while marginalising other stakeholders. In Oman, however, decision-making is centralised and is confined to the government and the extent to which powerful private interests influence these decisions is not very clear.

While the Ministry of Tourism is the government body responsible for the tourism sector, decision-making power in relation to planning and most macro level decisions, is centralised and remains with the Ministerial Council chaired by His Majesty, the Sultan; all plans must be approved by the Ministerial Council. Furthermore, decisions regarding the coordination of different plans, sectors and resources are the responsibility of the Supreme Planning Council. Ostensibly, as one central and very powerful body (the Ministerial Council) approves all plans, for all sectors and another central and powerful body (the Supreme Council of Planning) coordinates the implementation of different plans, sectors, and resources, one could expect a certain level of efficiency and coordination in the planning. However, the findings indicate that while the planning process may be relatively smooth as the plans are made, the implementation of these plans and their outcomes in terms of actual achievements and targets are far from smooth or effective.

Although, individual ministries such as MoT are considered responsible for operational decisions for their own sectors, the centralised nature of decision-making within an autocratic governance model translates into ineffective strategic and operational decisions, especially when multiple sectors overlap as in tourism. The perception of centralised power in decision-making is so extreme that the MoT has little power to enforce tourism plans, sometimes even at project level, as implementation requires actions and approvals by multiple government bodies over whom they have little influence or power. This can be seen by the emphasis in the discourse that *'MoT does not give the final approvals'*, *'MoT does not have the authority'*, *'MoT needs more authority'*.

As noted by Azeiteiro et al. (2012), the top-down management system is a major constraint to effective stakeholder participation especially if it does not allow power sharing in decision-making. The findings in this study reveal a notable lack of effective power sharing or collaboration at different levels of the government hierarchy in Oman and this hinders planning and implementation in addition to rendering stakeholder participation quite ineffective. This is made clear by the fact that OTS 2040 is yet to be approved by the Ministerial Council despite all the publicity and the efforts by the MoT and the consultants

and the participation of ‘key’ stakeholders. These findings are in line with those of Marzuki et al. (2012) and Eshliki and Kaboudi (2012) that a top-down governance style or the lack of stakeholder participation creates problems in implementation and coordination in some developing countries. The diversity of the tourism sector requires reliance on many other sectors, thus making it even more important for all to participate effectively in making planning including implementation decisions.

Key problems which are natural offshoots of a top-down system where decision-making power is vested only at the very top of the hierarchy, is that it results in excessive bureaucracy, delays in decision-making and inefficient or ineffective decisions. This study finds that the government ministries in Oman, are limited to mainly operational decisions within their own sectors and all decisions that have a national or regional impact are taken at a higher level such as the Ministerial Council or by His Majesty the Sultan himself.

7.3 Bureaucracy and Fragmented Decision-making

The problems resulting from centralised macro level decision-making on one hand and fragmented operational decisions by multiple government bodies on the other hand, have drastically affected the outcomes and implementation of all national and regional plans. Hence, a main point of frustration among almost most stakeholders but especially the tourism businesses, is the bureaucracy and slow progress achieved in implementation, which is revealed in expressions such as *‘they delay things’*, *‘delay the process’*, *‘lack of quick decision-making processes’*, *‘implementation of projects is very slow’*. Constraints and delays in implementation of plans have been so significant that the government of Oman established a new instrument of governance, TANFEED, to speed up implementation of plans. However, despite engaging more widely with the private sector and other stakeholders through discussions, TANFEED apparently does not address the key problem of centralised decision making when it comes to macro level decisions irrespective of sector. Although it is intended to be a *‘self-governing kind of initiative’* TANFEEDH is constrained as their recommendations still have to go *‘the main ministerial committees who make the decisions’*. As it ultimately must follow the same top-down authoritarian system of decision-making it will likely be of limited effect based on all indications to date. Nevertheless, stakeholder experience with TANFEEDH and OTS 2040 did reveal their enthusiasm and support for the stakeholder participation concept.

The tourism sector in Oman in comparison to other sectors seem to have been particularly affected impacted by the decisions or lack therefore of multiple government ministries and organisations over whom the MoT has little control. There is also a strong perception that the tourism sector lacks direction and that government officials lack the required expertise for planning. See present throughout the discourse phrases such as *'there is no direction for tourism'*, *'we really need to be planning ahead'*, *'there must be new blood'*, *'more professionalism'*, *'must be efficient and expert'*. Furthermore, the expected economic returns to the country, wider public and in particular, for local communities, have yet to be realised. The interviews and FGDs revealed that the majority of participants of all stakeholder groups are aware of these problems and recommend appropriate decision-making power especially at the Ministry (MoT) level; there were many suggestions that rather than the MoT, the Supreme Planning Council or another decision-making body representing multiple players or stakeholders must be directly involved to enable faster and more effective decisions at the implementation stage. For example, statements such as *'SCP which should plan in collaboration with other government organisations'*; *'should be at least at the Supreme Council level'* reflect the need for a higher-level body to enable coordination and quick decisions.

Fragmentation in decision-making and lack of coordination calls for effective stakeholder collaboration. The literature states that stakeholder collaboration can lead to consensus based on common objectives and reduces lack of coordination between government organisations. Ladkin and Bertramini (2002) and Skelcher et al. (2005) find that collaboration between stakeholders helps to integrate the planning process by reducing the fragmented and scattered nature of decision-making and by facilitating dialogue. Stakeholder participation in planning and development is best led by a single entity according to Moscardo (2011), Saftic (2011) and Cao (2015). The MoT being the Ministry responsible for tourism should ideally be this single entity which is authorised to lead the process of collaboration and there is already a planning directorate at the MoT as revealed in the KI interviews. However, it is more likely that even if the MoT leads and manages the collaborative process, it will not have power or influence over other government stakeholders at the level required to take macro-level decisions that are required for implementing the plans nor will the other collaborating government organisations. As observed by government officials and others in the KI interviews and FGDs, the MoT does not have the authority to ensure the required level of stakeholder participation by other government stakeholders such as the Ministries of

Environment, Transport, Housing, Finance, Commerce and Industry, Agriculture and Fisheries, Regional Municipalities, and Royal Oman Police. The participation of all these bodies at a decision-making level is required to result in cohesive and enforceable planning and implementation decisions and currently such a platform is not available for tourism planning. Hence, whatever decisions are taken by the MoT are very operational in nature and can address only some of the problems within the sector creating delays and problems at later stages. This is in line with Cao's (2015) findings in China that rational arrangements at varied governmental levels with clearly defined roles and responsibilities and the establishment of a national level consolidated and authoritative institution that can make and implement overall tourism development strategies is required to address the multi-stranded nature of the Chinese government.

Hence, in Oman with the top-down hierarchy clearly exerting limits on how much the MoT can achieve by spearheading such collaboration, participants recommend a higher authority or council is formed for tourism. Such a body should not only enable the MoT to effectively manage stakeholder participation but should also be able to enforce implementation of its decisions. To be taken seriously, however, this body should derive its power by Royal Decree by the very top of the hierarchy i.e., by His Majesty, the Sultan and should be empowered to take both planning and implementation decisions related to tourism which are informed by an effective stakeholder participation process. Furthermore, to provide a faster and more effective platform for decision-making and coordination compared to the current system, this body must be focused on both strategic and implementation decisions related to the tourism sector and should have highest level representation from not only the MoT, but also all other connected government sectors.

7.4 Focus on Economic Gains

The government of Oman has identified tourism as one of the key sectors for diversifying the national economy and thereby reduce the dependence on oil revenues. The analysis of the planning documents and interviews reveal that this is the government's stated aim for tourism i.e., increased economic returns and effective diversification. Burns (2004) observes that tourism planning styles may be either based on the market and economic requirements or focused on development adopting democratic methods. The focus of the national plans namely Oman Vision 2020, is purely on the economic imperatives of the government with the different government bodies as key stakeholders and was completely government driven.

The tone of the document reflects a state driven, hierarchical planning process, based on an assumption that by involving various government bodies in the planning process, the outcomes would be representative of all sectors as these bodies have the knowledge of their sectors and the expertise required. Although a token reference is made to the private sector having an important role in development, the critical discourse analysis reveals that their involvement is insignificant and did not influence the plans in any way.

Hence, although the plans focused on economic gains, Vision 2020, did not involve or consider the requirements for a strong private sector role adequately and this can be seen in the poor achievement of the plans. The poor performance was criticised by stakeholders in this study, who noted that tourism's contribution to Oman's GDP was below 2% which is much lower than in other countries. For instance, the UNTWO in 2013 observed that tourism brings in a minimum of 6% GDP for developing countries (Jenkins, 2015).

These issues were supposedly addressed in OTS 2040 at least in relation to tourism, by adopting a more industry-oriented approach, in the planning process which as noted by Getz (1986) has a wider remit than economic-boost, the industry-oriented approach also focuses on matching market demand with supply issues such as employment and investment. Similarly, OTS 2040 has a wider focus than Oman Vision 2020 and emphasises the importance of attracting investment in tourism from the private sector and providing employment for Omanis. OTS 2040 was led by a team of expert consultants and as noted by Morpeth and Honglang (2015), a key feature of the industry-oriented approach is an expert-led planning style where experts' views lead the government decision-making process.

OTS 2040 emphasises the government and the private sector as the key stakeholders of tourism as they are the two main actors required to achieve its objectives. Hence OTS 2040 does reflect a positive shift away from the sole focus on government perspectives as in Vision 2020, to involving non-government stakeholders in the planning process. However, the key objectives remain economic, or market driven which may be more achievable with the active involvement of the private sector. With this focus on industry driven economic gains, the question is how far did OTS 2040 consider the non-economic aspects of tourism development? Both the document analysis and the KI interviews reveal the lack of involvement by elected public representatives or council members, A'Shura Council, Municipal Council, or NGOs and other government organisations such as the larger regional municipalities etc. The involvement of these stakeholders was limited to being passive

observers of OTS 2040 through presentations in road shows or being shown part of the documents. This implies that there was likely less emphasis on consideration of environmental and socio-cultural aspects. OTS 2040 attempts to address the lack of wider or public participation by emphasising that more than a ‘100’ experts were involved in its validation, thereby, implying that all relevant local concerns have been considered. However, as the ‘starting point’ for Oman’s new tourism development phase (THR 2016, p.22), the exclusion of stakeholder groups from the planning process has the potential to lead to issues or problems at later stages which can affect the implementation of OTS 2040. As noted by several interview participants there are major problems and delays relating to implementation and coordination of tourism plans and projects as there are multiple stakeholders with differing interests including the public. According to Dredge and Jamal (2015), better returns from tourism planning can only be achieved by considering and integrating the perspectives of the different stakeholders from economic, social, and service institutions so that there is sufficient coordination at later stages.

The lack of a holistic approach to tourism which connects environment, local people as well as the wider economy is a key reason why tourism plans in developing countries fail to be implemented as noted by Yanes et al. (2019) and Oman is no exception to this weakness. Moreover, excluding wider stakeholders from planning is also not in line with the literature which overwhelmingly shows that to ensure sustainability of the tourism industry, its planning and development must consult a wide range of stakeholders in order to adequately address non-economic issues including social, cultural and environmental concerns (Morpeth and Hongliang, 2015; Pjerotić et al. 2016; Lin and Simmons, 2017, Andriotis et al. 2018; Var and Gun, 2020).

7.5 Economic Gains vs Adverse Tourism Impacts

While almost all stakeholders in this study understand the importance of tourism to economic growth and development of Oman, stakeholders differ in how they prioritise these benefits from tourism development. There were also mixed views about the negative impact of tourism on the environment, Omani culture, society, and national security. Many participants expressed concern about the negative impacts of tourism and emphasised the importance of ensuring environmental protection and preserving Omani values and culture. In some respects, these considerations are in tension since some economic benefits of tourism may be gained only at the expense of the environment or socio-cultural values, at least to some extent.

The tourism industry is a main user of the natural environment and resources (Burns, 2004) and the economic gains approach sees natural and cultural resources as commodities to be exploited to maximise economic returns to the country (Morpeh and Hongliang, 2015). This controversy results in conflicting priorities and therefore sufficient consideration and planning is required to offset not only any adverse impacts to the environment and socio-cultural values but also potential conflicts at later stages which can render tourism development unsustainable.

This tension and conflicting priorities between economic gains and adverse impacts are very much evident in the tourism stakeholder discourse in Oman; concerns such as tourism if not planned and managed effectively '*will affect the local culture and values*' and '*should be done in a way that ensures preservation, sustainability and protection*' were brushed aside by others who felt that the Omani culture was '*immune to negative impacts*' and that the environment would be protected '*because if you harm the environment then you will harm tourism*'. On this last point, some participants felt that there is no inherent conflict between tourism development and the environment as they are interdependent and therefore in harmony as suggested by Toney and OgârlacI (2012: p.159). Their argument is based on two assumptions: (a) tourism needs a healthy environment; and (b) a healthy environment needs tourism for development. On the first assumption, that tourism needs a healthy environment, Oman relies on its natural environment to attract tourism, so it must maintain its environment to maximise tourism. On the second assumption, that a healthy environment needs tourism, respondents claim that tourists expect to visit natural environments that are in pristine condition, so there is an incentive for government and local communities to take good care of their natural resources.

Even if there is a symbiotic relationship between tourism and the environment, it is more than likely that some tensions will still exist between stakeholders with economic goals and stakeholders with environmental and cultural goals and with local community. This can be seen from the statements such as '*locals refused digging in their areas*', '*local people complained*'. The fact is there will be conflicts which inevitably involve trade-offs. Hence the suggested harmony between tourism development and the environment can be realised only by sustainable tourism planning (Padin, 2012), especially at regional and local levels, which requires judgements about acceptable trade-offs as a price to be paid for economic

benefits and hence wider stakeholder participation was emphasised by several stakeholders in this study.

The literature offers many examples of cases where tourism development has not been sustainable leading to uncontrolled development, environmental degradation, and socio-cultural issues (Loumou et al. 2000; Kapera, 2018) or conflicts between the community and other stakeholders (Gallo et al. 2018; Bobbio, 2019). In Oman, stakeholders expressed concerns over damage to marine life, coastal lands, other natural resources and natural habitats such as grazing land as well as harming the livelihood of local communities such as the fishermen, all of which are already occurring as a result of planned tourism projects. While the government claims it already limits the environmental impact of tourism projects, the evidence from the interviews implies that more effort is required at both the planning and implementation stages. Hence, while there is consensus among stakeholders that Oman has considerable scope for tourism expansion, there is strong concern that the lack of sustainable planning and involvement of local communities in planning and development will lead to further problems.

Oman has an old civilisation and culture, and it is a relatively safe country by international standards of national peace and security. As shown by many studies (Eshliki and Kaboudi, 2012; Woo et al. 2018; Wang et al. 2019; Wanner and Pröbstl-Haider, 2019) tourism can impact negatively on local culture and security and several stakeholders did express concern about potential impacts on Omani values, culture and way of life. However, others expressed views that the Omani culture was sufficiently strong and deeply rooted to withstand negative impact from tourism and so the economic benefits from tourism could be enjoyed without any risk to the country's cultural heritage. The inference here is that any impact on culture and values could be more than offset by the improvement in living standards and overall well-being through the creation of employment opportunities and, increased investments. Still others felt that the impact of tourism on the local society would be positive as the local culture and lifestyle was a tourism resource and so the government and local communities would be incentivised to protect the local culture, artefacts, and heritage sites.

Security concerns relating to tourism were expressed by some interviewees, especially government officials and local communities and examples cited included drug trafficking, theft, health risks, begging, and the personal safety of tourists. However, others noted that security risks were often exaggerated and there were complaints about the excessive vigilance

by police resulting in denial of visas to tourists and foreign workers in the tourism industry. The need to raise awareness and educate tour guides and staff working at airports and borders to prevent theft of archaeological artefacts was highlighted.

Despite the mixed views on the adverse impacts of tourism on Omani culture and security, the consensus was that tourism development should be carefully planned and managed. That the government of Oman has seriously considered tourism's potential to adversely impact the environment, and socio-cultural aspects, can be seen in its tourism strategy and target tourist segments. A selective or niche tourism strategy was considered by many stakeholders especially the government as the key to minimise potentially negative impacts especially on the local culture and values. This was evident in the discourse with the many references to '*you need to be selective*'; '*aim at the premium segment*'; '*special interests*' '*segments*'; etc. Such a strategy involved carefully targeting high end tourist segments, who according to them, would cause the least impact on local culture and avoiding segments that are not aligned with or could damage the local culture. Advocates of niche tourism draw support from the literature which describes niche tourism as being more sustainable than mass tourism with less adverse impacts (Henderson, 2015) while drawing on a country's unique natural attractions and local culture (Benur and Bramwell, 2015). As noted by (Novelli, 2005, Feighery, 2012; Henderson, 2015), niche tourism is more environmental friendly compared to mass tourism and can appeal to premium segment customers by providing a rich tourist experience.

The high-end niche segment of the tourism market is Oman's strategy to fend off criticisms of adverse impacts of tourism on the environment and culture. And inherent within this strategy is the use of both the local culture and the natural environment as valuable tourism resources. Another argument for niche tourism in Oman is that mass tourism requires more upfront investment from the government for infrastructure than does niche tourism (Christou, 2012). However, this study finds that there are advocates of mass tourism in Oman (they are mostly private sector stakeholders) who argue that niche tourism may not achieve Oman's objectives of generating high enough revenues to effectively diversify the economy. Moreover, they argue that such a strategy may not be effective in preserving the country's environment and culture, while mass tourism products such as popular resorts can restrict any negative impacts by concentrating tourism into selected places. Such critiques find support in the literature. For example, (Lew et al. 2004, Benur, and Bramwell, B., 2015) finds

that niche tourism has less capacity than mass tourism to generate revenue, and that even small groups can cause damage to tourism attractions, if they are not managed well. Local culture can also be abused because of niche tourists' demands for more interactions with the indigenous cultures (Benur and Bramwell, 2015), while niche segments such as eco-tourists can adversely impact marine life (Meissner et al. 2015). Moreover, with the difficulty of generating funds and attracting investors for tourism development projects as revealed in this study, Oman's strategy for targeting premium and niche segments may need revisiting.

Despite the majority favouring a niche tourism strategy, the decision may, ultimately, lie outside the control of the Omani government, because it will be settled by the forces of demand and supply. Demand factors include the growth rate in travel, tourist needs, level of involvement and use of tourism products all of which fluctuate. Moreover, international tour operators, hotel chains and airlines wield immense power over tourism destinations and therefore in influencing policies and economies (Novelli, 2005). Supply factors include niche heritage attractions, both natural and man-made, but they may be limited in number and insufficient to meet the growing demand of tourism. In other words, the result may be for Oman to decide in favour of mass tourism by default at some stage, due to market imperatives rather than by choice. Another consideration is that even if the government follows a niche tourism strategy, it might end up attracting mass tourists. There are examples of attractions growing from niche to mass, such as Sharm El Sheikh in Egypt (Amar, 2016). As indicated in OTS 2040. Oman intends to highlight its eco and adventure tourism offerings and according to Robinson et al. (2011), segments such as adventure tourism could grow into a mass level rather than stay niche.

Ogaboh Agba et al. (2010) finds that even the best intentions and strategies by the government to safeguard local cultures and ways of life can fail without involvement and monitoring by local stakeholders. This is particularly significant when bringing strategies and plans that have worked elsewhere to Oman as they would require careful planning and involvement of all stakeholders especially at local level to ensure there is appropriate contextualisation and localisation. Many participants stressed the need for more effective stakeholder engagement with the objective of reaching consensus to achieve appropriate balance in tourism planning and development in Oman, using expressions such as '*consensus-making is also a must*', '*you must create a mechanism for it [consensus building]*'. The considerably high level of agreement among stakeholders in favour of

Oman's niche tourism strategy at least for the present, can make it easier for the government to move to the next step of organising collaboration on planning for and promoting niche tourism. Many countries do not have such a consensus, and struggle to get public agreement on the direction of tourism policy (Richard, 2002).

It must also be noted that the level of consensus and awareness among stakeholders on niche tourism is the result of sustained effort by the MoT in emphasising the benefits of niche vs mass tourism over several years, possibly, in order to reduce resistance to the tourism sector. One way to give expression to this consensus is by strengthening the planning process; for example, the involvement of more environmental stakeholders in the planning and management of the country's natural attractions can help in setting much needed rules and standards to protect the natural environment (Lew et al. 2004, Dedeke, 2017), and the involvement of local communities can help in protecting traditional jobs which can enhance Oman's attractiveness for niche tourists. The call for more stakeholder participation in this study finds considerable support from the literature which stresses that the best way to address legitimate concerns and potential conflicts resulting from tourism's adverse impacts is by effectively engaging different interest groups and representatives of local communities in planning and development (Zawilińska and Szpara 2016; Gallo et al. 2018; Bobbio, 2019).

7.6 Expert Power

The KI interview findings indicate that many stakeholders perceive a lack of tourism planning expertise among government officials, notably in the MoT. The discourse reveals a strong argument for the use of expert power in the form of reputable international consultants, '*consultancy company is a must*', '*a consultant company has experience*', '*consultancy company would have international experience*' and '*have a clear vision for tourism*'. Even though they do not agree on the level of control consultants should have over the planning process, the majority of stakeholders believed that the government must use consultants at least in the initial stages of planning any tourism strategy. The emphasis on international expertise stems from the value of learning from other destinations rather than starting from scratch. This belief in expert consultant power is strong and permeates all planning by the government. This can be seen, for example, in having experts validate government plans as in Oman Vision 2020 or in having consultants lead and develop the plans themselves as in OTS 2040. This approach is akin to Dryzek's (1997) description of 'administrative rationalism' or 'leave it to the experts' in environmental decision-making which considers

that experts or people with fine intellects can be relied on to find the best solution to every planning problem.

The reliance on consultants in tourism planning in Oman has increased with the passage of time as seen in OTS 2040; presumably, the failure of Vision 2020 to reach the stated diversification targets is a key reason for the increased reliance on consultants in OTS 2040. The discourse analysis of interview findings also revealed that in Oman, government officials often exert a level of control over consultants by getting them to agree to or follow their own viewpoints. As consultants are paid by the government for their service, this means that they would have to agree or risk losing their contracts. This could explain some of the participants' observations that Oman really does not benefit much from international experience as the expertise brought by consultants is not used well. This is in accordance with Tennoy et al. (2015, p.24) who find that often decision-makers use experts to defend their choices, but if experts' recommendations contradict their own previous planning experiences or their political agenda, planners often do not use expert knowledge. Oman's non-participative style of decision-making can exert pressure even on consultants to comply with the views of government officials or if they do not, expert recommendations can be disregarded by the only decision maker which is the government.

Moreover, some stakeholders believe that based on previous experiences in Oman, plans developed by international consultants without adequate consultation and participation in decision-making by all stakeholders will not be contextualised enough to meet the needs of the Omani tourism sector and will not be successful. Hence, expressions such as '*just copy and paste plans*', '*does not understand our society*', '*without understanding the local community and the local issues*', were made about consultants by several stakeholders. So, while the use of consultants as experts in Oman for planning purposes may overcome the lack of government experts, the resulting plans may not succeed if adequate level of contextualisation and understanding of the real problems that hinder effectiveness and implementation of the plans are not addressed within the plans themselves. To be effective, plans will have to incorporate specific mechanisms and strategies to address current core issues in planning and implementation such as the fragmented decision-making, lack of authority by the MoT, resource allocation and centralised decision-making, as well as mechanisms to engage and educate stakeholders to prevent potential conflicts and adverse impact at later stages. OTS 2040 (or what is made available to the public so far) may not

address these issues with the level of specificity and detail required, since much of the discourse on future steps reflects sentiments of the MoT rather than stakeholder informed strategies to address the systemic weaknesses.

Another weakness of the top-down model of planning and decision-making is that it does not allow stakeholders any say on the topics for discussion. Planners often decide the topics for discussion in advance and expect stakeholders to agree on them, as noted by Fraser et al. (2006). The critical discourse analysis of OTS 2040 and interviews reveals that the MoT and the consultants decided the topics or issues for discussion before meeting with tourism businesses, other government organisations and academia. Given the perception of lack of planning expertise of MoT officials, it is unlikely that they would have been able to identify all key issues before hand and so the topics would have been decided by the consultants based on their own experience and MoT briefings. It is unclear if the agenda or the list of topics were influenced in any way during the stakeholder consultation process and if so, to what extent. By limiting stakeholder engagement to certain identified issues or topics, important areas or gaps may not have been identified or addressed in the participation process for OTS 2040.

7.7 Local Community Perceptions

Consistent with Yanes et al. (2019) findings that many developing countries have failed to provide sufficient benefit for their local communities, this study finds that the benefits of tourism development in Oman have not been shared or felt by local communities. In fact, the examples of conflicts between local communities in Oman and tourism businesses or the government revealed in the interviews, indicate that there is a level of resistance or non-acceptance of tourism development by local communities who view it as a threat to their livelihood, cultural values, or way of life. Several references were made by all stakeholders especially using expressions such as *'local people may oppose'*, *'projects worth millions could be stopped because of people's views'*, *'locals refused'*, which reveal that local community resistance is clearly present. Tourism development can affect local communities significantly, and part of tourists' experience in a destination is mixing with the local community. Therefore, local communities normally expect benefits from tourism, but if development plans do not meet their expectations then they could spoil the tourists' experience (Safic, 2011). If the current resistance or conflicts with local community grows further or is not addressed effectively, it could endanger Oman's tourism development.

A key feature of the economic-boost approach is that it sees cultural and natural resources as a means of maximising economic returns to the country. This approach, which is found in the discourse of some respondents in the study, considers all tourism resources, including people, as a means to bring economic benefits to the country, and it regards with displeasure local stakeholders who voice opposition to tourism development projects. The opinion that local stakeholders' perceptions are not important can be seen in the discourse through expressions such as '*they [public/normal people] would think of their own interest not the public interest*', '*these people may not be important*', '*if you talk to taxi drivers you will end up nowhere*'. In contrast to this view is one where the natural and cultural attractions of a destination are seen as benefiting the local community as in the community-based approach (Morpeh and Hongliang, 2015). The latter approach aims at a fairer distribution of the benefits of tourism to local communities in tourism destinations and devolves more power to the local community level. This is also evident in the discourse of participants through expressions such as '*local people have the right to know*', '*local people who are in the area should participate*'.

Both Vision 2020 and OTS 2040 included the public and local communities at the end of the planning process when they were presented with some of the final outcomes, but this cannot be considered as participation. There was criticism of this approach as was seen by the use of phrases such as '*an absolute shame*', '*they [merely] sent us a letter*', '*they do not trust our expertise*'. It also reveals a lack of power by stakeholders such as SMEs and local community representatives who are not invited to participate in the dialogue currently. The majority of participants in this study were not impressed with the track record of MoT's decisions and noted that if stakeholders were involved early on in the planning cycle, potential problems with local communities and adverse environmental impacts could have been identified early and therefore ameliorated. Such involvement should happen at the local planning level. The literature is full of evidence on the important role that local communities play in tourism (Tosun, 2005; Beeton, 2006; Florida, 2013, Saufi et al. 2014, Chili and Ngxongo 2017) and active community participation at all stages is considered essential for sustainable development. Moreover, participation in the planning process can enable groups who have not been previously engaged to feel a sense of ownership over the resulting plans, (Amran et al. 2013), and address concerns that local communities have (Fraser et al. 2006). Similarly, the Omani government could effectively reduce community resistance by engaging with the local public in a more effective manner before plans are set so that they develop a sense of

ownership. Such participation could start initially through an appropriate level of consultation and transparency at the level of local community leaders and elected representatives before opening more to the public which can take time.

A key reason for this lack of public involvement is the perception that the public and local communities are not aware or educated enough to understand either the process or complexities of tourism to be effective participants. References to the public or local community using expressions such as '*may not get the message clearly*', '*these people may not be important*' while referring to community representatives as better if they are '*of an acceptable level of education*', '*and awareness*' emphasises the view that the public should not be directly involved. The interviews and FGDs reveal that this perception is shared by most of the government officials. In fact, there is a strong belief that inclusion of the Omani public in any planning will generate more problems and conflicts between stakeholders and therefore its best to not include them. These findings are in line with Byrd et al. (2009), Healy et al (2012), Webler and Tuler (2021), who note that critics of active public participation in tourism planning fear that it can lead to conflict between the local community and other stakeholders mainly due to the differences in perception about tourism development. Furthermore, as noted by Marzuki and Hay (2013) when the focus is on economic gains, the local community may be considered as being anti-development if they dissent.

So, it could very well be the Omani government is not taking any chances on the public dissenting or raising problems by not opening discussions or consultations at a wider public level. While some stakeholders feel that the local community is best represented by local leaders and elected representatives, there was no such engagement in either OTS 2040 or Vision 2020 either at national or regional levels. Local leaders and representatives in the interviews and FGDs indicated that they are involved only in terms of coordination or when conflicts arise at the implementation or operational stages.

Hence, a significant gap revealed by this study is the need for local awareness and education programs at the outset of the planning process itself. As emphasised by Burton and Mustelin (2013) efforts to include the public should begin with educating and empowering citizens and local communities to reach informed decisions by making the benefits and potential risks from tourism development clear to them. To date there is no evidence that there has been any campaign to educate the public or raise their awareness about the importance of tourism planning and their role in strengthening the effectiveness of planning. In today's digital age

and as noted by a government interviewee, there are several platforms which can be used for directing public awareness programs at specific communities which should be involved or require the education. As noted by some of the media and academic participants, they can also help in spreading awareness if they are involved in the tourism planning process. Strengthening public participation especially local community participation gradually is fundamental if the stated objectives for the growth of Oman's tourism sector is to be achieved in a sustainable manner.

7.8 Stakeholder Consultation not Decision-Making

Another significant finding of this study is that almost all stakeholder groups and participants expressed the importance of improving the planning process by strengthening stakeholder participation especially at the initial stages of the planning process. Their insistence on being involved at the beginning of the planning process expresses their concerns that plans are developed without adequate input from stakeholders and does not address their interests or valid problems and concerns. Participants highlighted the importance of engaging with all issues relevant to each stakeholder group and therefore this implies that the agenda for discussion must not be top-down. Instead, they want the freedom to raise issues and topics they consider relevant to the planning and development process.

However, even though participants emphasised the importance of extensive and effective stakeholder engagement, they saw a clear distinction between stakeholder participation and decision-making. For most participants, decision-making is the role of the government and they did not see a role for non-government stakeholders in this process including the public. This was repeatedly made clear by stakeholders, for example: '[non-government stakeholders] *not necessarily as decision makers*', '*at the end the decision should be for the MoT*', '*we can only give recommendations*', '*but not to make the decisions*', '*it is the government who decides*'. Many participants referred to participation as stakeholder 'consultation' thus implying that stakeholders should be consulted on all issues and the government should make decisions based on their recommendations arising out of such consultation. Therefore, a significant finding is that most stakeholders did not envision a collaborative approach to stakeholder participation where there is "joint decision-making among autonomous key stakeholders" (Jamal and Getz, 1995, p.188). Indeed, joint decision making was seen as quite an alien concept by almost all participants to the non-democratic political system of Oman, and they were, quite comfortable with the notion of only the

government taking final planning decisions. The concept of stakeholder participation is itself predicated on the notion of such participation influencing the outcomes but as noted by Sakitri, (2018), Van Nguyen et al. (2020), for many developing countries, the concept of stakeholder participation and collaboration in decision and policy making can be new concepts. This is true for Oman, as top-down centralised decision-making has been entrenched in the political and governance landscape over several decades. According to Agger (2012) the extent of public participation in policy making should be tailor-made to match the requirements of a particular country or destination. In terms of the various typologies of stakeholder participation (Brager & Specht, 1973; Pretty 1995; Arnstein 1969) and Marzuki and Hay's (2013) framework of public participation, non-government stakeholder participation in Oman would stop after consultation. That is, most stakeholders in Oman consider that non-government stakeholders' role in participation ends with the consultation stage where they discuss all issues relevant to the plan or the project but does not proceed to the empowerment stage where they would participate in decision-making.

However, participants also held the view that even if stakeholders do not participate in taking decisions, there must be a mechanism within the consultation stage to enable the differing stakeholders to reach some level of agreement or consensus if participation is to inform government decisions effectively. Some participants stressed the need for reaching consensus among stakeholders during the participation process to make it easier for government's decisions to address stakeholder recommendations. They noted that this would require compromise among stakeholders to ensure that shared objectives of a strong and sustainable tourism sector are achieved. Consensus has the potential to enhance coordination between government stakeholders, reduce local resistance and strengthen planning and implementation of development projects (Ladkin and Bertramini, 2002; Margerum, 2002; Boon et al. 2013; Zawilińska and Szpara, 2016). However, consensus requires transparency and sharing of all relevant information between stakeholders which is something that government organisations in Oman will have to work towards, as currently information and media is controlled to a large extent by the state through the government organisations. According to Bello et al. (2016, p. 447), media involvement in stakeholder participation process provides "transparency" and reduces doubts over the intentions of the stakeholders. The role of both government and media in educating and spreading awareness of all relevant data and issues must be strengthened in order to achieve the shared objective of achieving sustainable growth and development of the Omani tourism sector.

Therefore, in accordance with Pita et al. (2010), stakeholders in Oman do expect their participation to be carried out effectively and transparently and to lead directly to decision-making; the only point of difference is that the responsibility of making the actual decisions is the government's. The last may not be particularly problematic because as noted by Dryzek (1997), there is no best way of how decisions should be made in planning. The participants in this study expect the government to take more effective and informed decisions which integrate and reflect their multiple viewpoints, and they expect decisions to be made faster i.e., soon after the stakeholder engagement process. This implies that the government would take the final planning and development decisions in the interests of the country by reconciling differing viewpoints.

Currently, many stakeholders such as tourism businesses express disappointment and frustration that even when they are consulted by the MoT and they present a consensus of opinion, decisions are made much later by the government and they do not reflect their recommendation or consensus. Delays in implementation of plans and lack of following stakeholder input were felt to be the biggest weakness in the tourism planning process as was seen in comments such as *'lot of discussions but decisions come later'*, *'nothing is done about what has been said'*, *'implementation of projects is very slow'*, *'getting licenses from government organisations in a short time'*, *'we have problems of implementation'*, *'implementation of these decisions is bad'*. If government decisions do not reflect stakeholder views, then this implies there are other priorities which were considered more important by the decision makers. This sometimes reveals a lack of coordination, engagement as well as transparency during the stakeholder participation process where the government did not disclose all conflicting priorities to participating stakeholders which might persuade them to realign their recommendations accordingly. Or it could mean that the decisions were not made at the level of the MoT but at a higher level which did not give much value to the stakeholder participation process and the consensus claimed to be reached. There were numerous statements such as *'they are all working separately'*, *'they [the MoT] should coordinate, etc.'*

This brings a question of how much importance or value the Omani government as a whole or at the very top of the hierarchy such as the Ministerial Council attaches to stakeholder participation in planning and implementation. From the critical discourse analysis of Oman Vision 2020, it appears very little value is placed on wider participation other than at a

superficial level; non-government stakeholders certainly did not influence decision making other than maybe at the level of international economic or development organisations such as the World Bank. OTS 2040 presents a radical difference from this approach in that it considered tourism businesses as a key stakeholder along with other government organisations and engaged with them more widely; it also included local tourism experts in the validation process at the end of which the plan was developed by the team of international consultants. But since final decision-making power rests with the Ministerial Council and unless this council attaches due importance and value to stakeholder participation and expert knowledge, the risk is that they may not approve 2040 or parts of it or may not give priority to its implementation when faced with competing government priorities. That the government is indeed beginning to consider stakeholder participation as important is seen with the process of establishing TANFEEDH. In order to address all the problems related to implementation of plans, the government of Oman held a series of wider stakeholder participation across different sectors with government and non-government bodies discussing the problems together. Although delays persist with TANFEEDH, this shows the government's increasing willingness to be more participative, open and transparent in its planning and implementation efforts.

7.9 A Framework for Tourism Planning and Stakeholder Consultation for Non-Democratic Countries

The third objective of this thesis is to develop a framework for the tourism planning and stakeholder consultation process (FTPSC) for Oman that considers the weaknesses and challenges identified in the study and further strengthens stakeholder participation in the planning process (Figure 9). In developing the integrated framework, the theoretical underpinnings of tourism planning as well as the perspectives of stakeholders from this study were considered. Thus, the proposed integrated framework is based on but further builds on the existing theoretical framework of both the tourism planning process and stakeholder participation stages.

7.9.1 Theoretical Framework

As shown in the literature review (Chapter 2, Table 1), tourism planning stages are normally divided into three (McCann, 1983; Jordan et al. 2013) and includes identifying relevant issues to be considered in planning (problem or direction setting), deciding the goals, objectives,

and mechanisms (development of the plan) and taking action on the plan (implementation). Moscardo (2011) includes stakeholder participation within the planning process but otherwise does not vary much in the core steps.

Marzuki and Hay (2013) developed an extended and detailed Public Participation Framework (PPF) that is based on the original stakeholder participation typologies of Brager & Specht (1973), Pretty (1995) Arnstein (1996). See Table 2 in Chapter 2 for a comparative summary. The Marzuki and Hay PPF offers a practical approach to executing stakeholder participation and offers insights on how to effectively plan for and implement stakeholder participation. It provides a more detailed process and planning for stakeholder participation and details five steps at the planning stage culminating in the Public Participation Plan. At the second stage the Public Participation Plan is implemented in three levels and ends with stakeholders empowered in decision-making.

The integrated framework proposed in this thesis integrates and further builds on the tourism planning stages as in Moscardo (2011) and the Public Participation Framework proposed by Marzuki and Hay (2013). It integrates the two i.e., the tourism planning stages, and the stakeholder participation stages are integrated and aligned rather than presented as two separate processes. The proposed framework is also contextualised to provide a suitable framework for planning and stakeholder participation that can be implemented in countries like Oman which have a top-down approach to decision-making or a non-democratic form of political governance. The framework is applicable to all levels of planning i.e national, regional, and local and recommends appropriate government bodies to take the lead in the process under the umbrella of a single integrated body that oversees tourism development in the country. The integrated framework for the tourism planning and stakeholder consultation also identifies the relevant stakeholders to be involved at each level of planning, with maximum local participation in local level plans. In addition to theoretical underpinnings presented above, further insights from the literature inform various aspects of the design of the proposed FTPSC. These insights along with the integrated framework are presented and discussed in the following sections.

7.9.2 A Central Body for Tourism Planning

Saftic (2011) and Cao (2014) both recommend that a single organisation must be identified to lead the tourism planning and consultation process as multiple stakeholders are involved.

The KI interviews and FGD findings reveals that a major weakness is that the Ministry of Tourism with its designation as just another Ministry does not have power over other ministries, government bodies and sectors to effectively coordinate and implement their tourism plans and decisions. Moreover, with the centralised decision-making system, the MoT also does not have the required level of authority to take macro level tourism planning decisions thereby delaying the approval and implementation of tourism plans as in the case of OTS 2040. As emphasised by Hall (2011) sustainable tourism development requires substantial government efforts and coordination outside normal tourism-specific governance. Furthermore, Bramwell & Lane (2011) and Damme and Brans (2012) argue that bespoke governance systems may be required for providing clear direction and to allow practical progress in tourism development according to the context.

The integrated framework proposes that the responsibility of overseeing the national level planning process and taking all final decisions relating to the tourism planning and development process is assigned to a dedicated Tourism Council that is formed for this purpose. The Tourism Council should be assigned authority from the very top of the hierarchy i.e. preferably, His Majesty the Sultan and if not, the Ministerial Council. This would mean that in terms of hierarchy of decision-making, it would report directly to the Ministerial Council and therefore does not present any constraints to the existing system of governance. However, the Tourism Council, should be empowered adequately with appropriate Ministerial representation of all relevant sectors to enable decision-making without referring to the Ministerial Council for approval of tourism plans and policies except on issues considered sensitive enough or comes directly under the power of His Majesty. For example, His Majesty has the sole power to allocate any land for public interest (MoJLA, 2021). It is also proposed that the Tourism Council is headed by the Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court as this Ministry is considered the most powerful ministry as it represents the Sultan. This would ensure a sufficient level of power and influence to take and implement decisions.

The creation of the Tourism Council directly addresses the lack of decision-making power of the MoT and the integrative nature of tourism planning and development decisions. By bringing together the relevant ministers in one platform within the planning system, it has the power and ability to take effective planning decisions and to eliminate problems of delays

and fragmented decisions of the various government stakeholders in implementing the plans.

The Ministers of the following ministries should be members of the Tourism Council:

1. Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court (Chair)
2. Minister of Heritage and Tourism (so named from late 2020)
3. Minister of Economy
4. Minister of Interior
5. Minister of Finance
6. Minister of Housing
7. Minister of Transport and Telecommunications
8. Minister of Commerce and Industry
9. Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries
10. CEO of the Public Authority for Environment (so named from late 2020)
11. General Inspector of Police and Customs (Royal Oman Police)

After the restructuring of the Ministries in late 2020, the newly formed Ministry of Economy (MoEC.) replaced the Supreme Council of Planning and is entrusted with the implementation of national plans. Hence its inclusion in the Tourism Council is key. The Ministry of Interior oversees all municipalities in Oman, including Municipals Councils, the regional governors, governorates, wails, and local communities' issues including tribal issues. Hence its role in national and particularly regional and local tourism development is vital in ensuring public representation and preventing conflicts between the community and other tourism stakeholders. In 2020, the Ministry of Environment was renamed as the Public Authority for Environment. Its inclusion in the Tourism Council is important for the consideration and coordination of environmental issues such as, environmental licensing and, conservation areas, etc. The role of the Ministry of Finance is vital in the allocation and coordination of national budgets and identifying possible funds. The Ministry of Housing is responsible for coordinating the allocation of land and deciding land use and plays a key role in approving projects, allocating land, and designating tourism destinations. The Ministry of Transport and Telecommunications initiates and coordinates infrastructure developments including airports, ports, road connections, logistics, and licensing of sea tour companies and so on. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry approves commercial law, investments, companies' registrations, businesses, and trade licenses. The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries approves coastal tourism related activities and projects such as, sea zonings etc. The Royal Omani Police takes decisions relating to the issue of visas and managing threats and security

issues. The role played by each of the above bodies impact the success of tourism planning and implementation and by bringing them together, the outcomes should be more cohesive, integrated, and unified.

7.9.3 Stage 1: Setting Goals and Priorities

The first stage in the proposed FTPSC is to set Goals and Priorities. These would-be broader priorities and aims of tourism development at the national level while they become more specific and contextualised at the regional and local levels. (e.g., at local levels they would be more specific in terms of projects). Stage one would be initiated and carried out by the Tourism Council at the national and regional levels.

As emphasised by Ibrahim (2013) national level plans should always set the context for all further plans in the country. Hence, care must be taken to ensure that directions and priorities set for tourism development are informed by and aligned to the overarching national level development plans (for example, Oman Vision 2040) that are already approved and in place. This would avoid the current situation where OTS 2040 was prepared before Oman Vision 2040. This ensures that the development goals set for the tourism sector in the national level plans are in line with the broader development plans for the country (as in Oman Vision 2040), thus enhancing the chances of success.

Furthermore, the national level tourism plan must then inform the regional plans in terms of objectives and targets which then inform the local plans. At each level of planning the plans become more specific and contextualised to the location. The Tourism Council decides on the goals and priorities for the national and regional tourism plans; at the local level the goals and priorities for this stage are set by the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Economy and all further steps are coordinated by the MoT and MoI which supervises all the regional and local municipalities involved in project approvals and monitoring at regional and local levels.

7.9.4 Stage 2a: Situation Appraisal: Current Performance

Similar to Mascaro's (2011) explanation of planning stages, the second stage in the proposed FTPSC, will be to conduct a Situation Appraisal. However, in the FTPSC, this stage is divided into 2 parts. The first part will be carried out by the MoT and includes a thorough analysis of all current data and information in relation to the status of the tourism sector. An

assessment of performance against measurable and objective targets and performance indicators for the previous planning period must also be carried out. It must also include a thorough inventory of current and potential tourism resources and assets for the development of the tourism sector. At the regional level, this process can be carried out by the regional arm of the MoT while at the local level the regional municipality collaborates with the MoT.

7.9.5 Stage 2b: Situation Appraisal: Macro Environmental Analysis

The second step of the situation appraisal should ideally be led by a team of tourism consultants, appointed by the Tourism Council. Consultants would have expert knowledge required to lead a comprehensive macro-level analysis including international trends in tourism. A strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis would be undertaken for the Oman tourism sector, as well the trends in international tourism and paying due attention to national political, economic, social, and technical environmental (Alnaqash, 2014, Tennøy, 2016). The FTPSC proposes that the services of international or national consultants are used at all levels of planning at least until such time that there is an appropriate level of planning expertise within the MoT to effectively lead and conduct planning.

7.9.6 Stage 3: Stakeholder Consultation Plan

The next stage of the FTPSC is similar to the planning stage of Mazruki and Hay's (2013) PPF. The main difference is that it adds one more step: consensus building instead of empowerment. In the FTPSC this stage is called the Stakeholder Consultation Plan (SCP), as that is the desired outcome of this stage. To develop the Stakeholder Consultation Plan, this stage involves six steps as follows:

- 1. Identifying Aims of Stakeholder Consultation:** The first step requires the Tourism Council and all involved government officials at all levels of planning to identify what is expected from the stakeholder consultation process. In this regard, it is very important they understand that the participation process is considered as a core part of the planning process to ensure sustainability and not a mere public relation exercise. This may require the consultants to conduct orientation sessions to enable Tourism Council members as the decision makers, to have a common understanding of the importance of stakeholder participation in sustainable tourism planning. The aims should include the commitment to incorporate stakeholder recommendations resulting from the participation process.

Aims of the stakeholder consultation can include reaching or negotiating consensus on sensitive issues, seeking solutions or ideas or testing stakeholder response or reactions to proposed actions among others. Based on the stated aims, the time, and resources to be allocated for the participation process should also be decided at the outset by the Tourism Council at the national and regional levels. At the local level, the aims of the stakeholder consultation process should be to seek more extensive stakeholder engagement to ensure there is adequate community collaboration and support for the tourism projects.

2. **Identifying Stakeholders:** This step requires the MoT and consultant under the umbrella of the Tourism Council to identify all players who have a direct and indirect stake in tourism development in Oman. The FTPSC builds on the classification of stakeholders into primary stakeholders (all those who are essential for the functioning of the activity such as government and tourism business) and secondary stakeholders (those who indirectly participate or are affected by tourism) see Clarkson, (1995) and Saftic, (2011) and divides tourism stakeholders into three categories. It is believed that this categorisation of tourism stakeholders in Oman into government, private and public stakeholders will be useful in raising awareness of the importance and role of all three stakeholder groups in sustainable tourism development. The three stakeholder categories and their corresponding organisations, agencies, and groups are to be included at each level of planning as shown in Table 9.

The Government stakeholder category includes all government bodies whose decisions directly or indirectly impact the tourism sector as well as the government owned tourism businesses. Private sector stakeholders include all tourism businesses and supporting services and investors; small and medium level establishments must also be included as the development of SMEs is a key national development priority. The Public stakeholder categories includes the public and their representatives and also the media, NGOs and experts such as academia who have a key role to play in informing and educating the public. The inclusion of public representatives and the increased involvement of multiple government bodies at each stages of planning is designed to address the findings from this study that more public participation and diverse participation in planning and implementation is required to reduce conflict and eliminate the fragmentation of planning and operational decisions. It also is aligned with the literature which stresses that the best way to address legitimate concerns and potential conflicts in tourism development is to

engage different interest groups and representatives of local communities in planning and development (McKercher et al. 2005; Zawilińska and Szpara 2016; Bobbio, 2019; Gallo et al. 2018).

Stakeholder Categories	National Level Planning	Regional Level Planning	Local Level Planning
Government Stakeholders	Government Ministries of: Tourism, Environment, Transport & Telecommunications, Interior (representing all regional municipalities), Commerce & Industry, Finance, Housing, Manpower	Regional Branches of MoT, MoEc, MoI, MoH, MoTT Regional Municipalities	Regional/Local Municipalities
	Royal Oman Police, Chamber of Commerce & Industry, OMRAN	Chamber of Commerce & Industry, OMRAN	Chamber of Commerce & Industry, OMRAN
	Government Owned Businesses	Government Owned Businesses	Government Owned Businesses
Private Sector Stakeholders	Tourism Businesses from all tourism related sectors including travel and tour companies, hotel & lodging, food and beverages, tourism marketing, transport	Tourism Businesses	Local Tourism Businesses
	Small & Medium Tourism Businesses	Small & Medium Tourism Businesses	Small & Medium Tourism Businesses
	Tourism Investors	Tourism Investors	Tourism Investors
Public Stakeholders	A'Shura Council	Regional Municipal Council	Local Municipal Council. Tribal Community Leaders, Residents

Stakeholder Categories	National Level Planning	Regional Level Planning	Local Level Planning
	Environmental & related NGOs	Environmental & related NGOs	Environmental & related NGOs
	Academia & Professional Bodies	Academia & Professional Bodies	
	Media & Communication	Media & Communication	Media & Communication

Table 9: FTPSC Stakeholder Categories and Groups

3. ***Deciding Consultation Agenda:*** The findings in this study suggest that OTS consultation topics were not influenced by tourism stakeholders in Oman, but only by government and experts. This is in line with Fraser et al. (2006), who found that top-down planning model failed to allow stakeholders to decide topics for discussion and recommended allowing local people to change the draft proposals and topics that were prepared by the authorities to improve effectiveness of outcomes. For this step, the MoT together with the consultants decides on the agenda or issues to be discussed during stakeholder consultation process at the national level. However, there should be flexibility in deciding the agenda, and all stakeholders should be invited to identify issues they consider to be priorities for the tourism sector. Hence, although the initial agenda may be prepared by the MoT and consultants (or specified bodies in regional and local levels), the final agenda should be the result of a two-way communication process between the government and other stakeholders. This exchange can happen either through surveys or by inviting all stakeholders to submit their top issues within a certain time frame.
4. ***Deciding Consultation Techniques:*** Next, the MoT together with the consultants should decide on the techniques for participation and this depends on the stated aims of the consultation process itself, the number of stakeholders and participants and the time allocated for participation. Such techniques as suggested by many participants in this study may include interviews, focus group, discussions, workshops, surveys, and polls (for larger numbers).
5. ***Consensus Building Techniques:*** The KI findings and the literature places emphasis on consensus building on core issues. Omani stakeholders feel that if they are able to reach

consensus, it is easier for the government to take appropriate action to address outcomes from stakeholder participation. Consensus building is considered an inherent part of the stakeholder participation process in Marzuki and Hays PPF and therefore is included as part of empowerment or joint decision-making. In the proposed FTPSC, consensus building through mediating techniques is given particular emphasis as the recommended level of stakeholder consultation does not rise to level of joint decision-making as is discussed in later section on stakeholder consultation. It also addresses the fact that the process of consultation is relatively new so stakeholders in Oman would need to be guided in arriving at consensus; it also directly seeks to address stakeholders' views that government decisions do not reflect stakeholders' perspectives. As noted by Warner (1997) consensus is challenged when there is a shortage of mediator skills. Recommendations for enabling consensus includes having a competent mediator during stakeholder consultations (Okazaki, 2008), building positive contact with participants and cooperation with different groups (Proença et al. 2018) and improving bargaining skills of local people (Pratt, 2019). Hence, practical and appropriate solutions to address the differing views of stakeholders by channelling as many core differences as possible into views that are acceptable to the participants must be decided at this stage.

6. ***Approval of the Stakeholder Consultation Plan:*** The final step involves putting together the outcomes of all the above 5 steps, to create the Stakeholder Consultation Plan which should be approved by the Tourism Council at national and regional levels as soon as possible, such approval at local level would be by the MoT and MoI.

7.9.7 Stage 4: Public Awareness Programme

The next stage of the FTP is to spread awareness and educate stakeholders about the aims of proposed plans/policies and the planning process that will be followed. Special attention must also be given to educating the public and stakeholders about the aims and process of stakeholder consultation and the roles of stakeholders in this process. At this stage as noted by Brager & Specht (1973), Pretty (1995) and, Arnstein (1969), communication will be mostly top down from the government to the public to increase participant and public understanding. However, there could also be opportunities provided for the wider public to comment or provide their views especially on issues they consider to be priorities for sustainable tourism development. These if appropriate included within the agenda for consultation. Moreover, as many participants suggested in this study, media and academic

stakeholders can be helpful to create awareness among the public at this stage and therefore should be involved. Although overall provision of this stage rests with the Tourism Council, the MoT will be responsible for this stage.

7.9.8 Stage 5: Stakeholder Consultation

After ensuring adequate awareness and understanding of the aims and their own roles within the planning process, the identified stakeholder groups are engaged in extensive consultations on the prepared Stakeholder Consultation Plan. This stage involves a two-way communication approach with information, ideas and perspectives being exchanged, discussed, and narrowed down to priorities, concerns and common areas of agreements being identified. Stakeholders must be clearly and explicitly informed about the stated aims of the consultations, and there must be transparency by the government on how stakeholder recommendations will inform decision-making i.e., the plans themselves. The extent of the consultation and discussion will depend on the aims of the consultation process and the level of the planning (i.e., national, regional, local): such aims may consist of reaching or negotiating consensus on key and sensitive issues, seeking solutions or ideas, or testing stakeholder response or reactions to proposed actions, among others.

A key issue in Oman as revealed in the OTS 2040 document analysis and KI findings are the bureaucratic processes and systems, overlapping and outdated regulatory framework and fragmented nature of operational level decision-making. As emphasised by Morpeth and Hongliang (2015), at a national level, successful implementation will require attention to elements such as tourism related legislation, investment incentives for the private sector, manpower resource planning as well as environmental and sociocultural considerations. Hence a key part of the stakeholder consultation process especially with the tourism businesses, SMEs and investors must be to identify regulatory constraints that hinder smooth and effective implementation and operations of plans and projects from the outset rather than wait for the implementation stage. However, in so doing the sustainability of the sector must not be compromised.

While it may not be possible to reach consensus on all or many issues, the intention must be to identify areas of agreement between all stakeholder groups especially on sensitive issues. Hence stakeholders must also be made to understand from the outset that in order to arrive at a desired level of agreement, the main focus will be sustainable tourism development and

therefore some compromise will be required by all involved. The consensus building techniques or mechanisms that are included in the Stakeholder Consultation Plan must be used here to ensure that the consultation process yields clear outcomes. As the FTPSC does not propose empowerment of non-government stakeholders in decision-making (in accordance with the views of stakeholders in this study) it is important that clear outcomes in terms of what is considered the best outcomes for the sustainable development of the sector should be reached. Mediation is key in this regard as noted by Drazkiewicz et al. (2015), and this stage must be managed by the consultants together with MoT.

7.9.9 Stage 6: Feedback to Stakeholders

In the literature, stakeholder participation typologies and Marzouki's and Hay's PPF includes empowerment as the next stage after stakeholder consultation. Empowerment is where stakeholder share in or take control of the decision-making process. However, as the findings of this study reveals, although stakeholders in Oman wanted to influence government decisions, they did not want to be part of the decision-making process i.e., they did not want to be empowered in decision-making.

It must be considered that sharing or giving control of decision-making to the public is probably not a feasible outcome in a non-democratic country like Oman. Nevertheless, it is important that the stakeholder consultation process and outcomes inform all final decisions. As the KI and FGD findings reveal although respondents do not want to be involved directly in decision-making, they do expect their recommendations and views to be considered and integrated in decisions. Therefore, it is important that after the consultation process, some time is spent on merging and synthesising the views, perspectives, solutions, or responses in order to arrive at appropriate strategies, actions, solutions or changes. With the preparation of OTS 2040, stakeholders were not informed about the outcomes of the consultation process, nor were the strategies or plans shared with them. This framework proposes that once, the consultants and the MoT have identified the strategies and actions to address stakeholder input, the participants must be informed of them. At this stage, in the case of national level plans, the approval of the Tourism Council on the identified strategies, policies or changes should be sought before stakeholders are informed so that there are no reversals at a later stage.

7.9.10 Stage 7: Development of the Plan

In Oman, tourism planning at the national level must be supported by the allocation of adequate financial planning, as this study finds that lack of adequate funds for tourism development is a key issue. As tourism is a relatively new sector in Oman, other national development needs, currently tend to be prioritised. This is also the reason why Oman tends to ignore overall development of local destinations and focuses on building hotels and resorts which can be developed in partnership with private investors. Hence, a critical aspect for tourism planning must include a financial strategy for generating adequate funds required to implement the strategy without which the plans would remain on the shelves. Approval of the financial strategy within the national tourism plan may also require the approval of the Ministerial Council if it includes allocation of national funds, so this should be sought at this stage. The membership of the Minister of Finance in the Tourism Council is helpful in taking decisions relating to planning and coordination of funds and budgets.

This focus of this stage is the preparation of the final or full version of the national regional/local plans, strategies, or actions. This will be carried out by consultants at the national level while at regional/local level it should be done by MoT staff who have the appropriate expertise in planning. The plans will differ in scope depending on the level of the planning; while the national plans will be more strategic and broader in their scope and direction, the national objectives and targets should inform the regional and local plans. Regional and local plans will be more specific to the specific regions, communities or project and therefore be more narrow but more detailed to better address the specific needs of localities (Ibrahim 2013; Cao 2015).

7.9.11 Stage 8: Implementation and Monitoring

The FTPSC planning stages differs from the other stakeholder participation typologies and Marzouki and Hay, in that it includes further steps in the last stage in the planning process which is implementation and monitoring. The implementation stage must be focused and practical to ensure the successful execution of the plan. Gaps between plans and implementation may arise because of weaknesses with the plans themselves such as lacking relevant details, being too broad to be feasible, insufficient analysis or miscalculations (Lai et al. 2006). Implementation may also fail due to lack of accountability and coordination among government planners and agencies or the lack of integration between national and

regional plans and frameworks (Dodds, 2007). Considering the findings of this study, which show the lack of coordination between government bodies, bureaucracy and fragmented government operations in Oman, such deficiencies require careful attention. Moreover, implementation of a national level plan requires further regional and local level planning for its execution.

- 1. *Implementation Committee:*** The implementation stage should begin with setting up an Implementation Committee (IC). The membership of the committee must include high level officials from all government bodies and agencies who have roles to play in the development of tourism. At the national level, the membership should be at an under-secretary or directorate general level within each of the Ministries included in the Tourism Council. The national IC reports directly to the Tourism Council and should be chaired by the under-secretary of Tourism. At regional level, the IC should be chaired by the director-general of tourism with membership from the MoT, MoE, MoH, regional municipalities, and the regional municipal council. At the local level, the IC could be chaired by the local governor, with membership from the MoT, MoI, Public Authority for Environment Authority, and local elected representatives from the municipal councils, to ensure adequate involvement of local stakeholders.
- 2. *Regulatory and Operational Action Plan:*** At the national level, the IC committee should examine all statutory, regulatory, operational, and procedural frameworks to identify all constraints that will hamper implementation of the tourism plan across all sectors and ensure effective resolutions. A considerable amount of information and perspective would have already been collected through the stakeholder consultation process. This step should ensure that all such issues as well as any further ones identified by the IC committee are jointly addressed across all government bodies so that there is cohesiveness and uniformity in decision-making. The objective should be to address overlap, reduce wasted time and inefficiency, and streamline the process without compromising environmental and security considerations. This would include requirements for approvals, licensing, permits, environment standards, allocation of land for tourism projects etc. to be jointly agreed. And all actions to be taken and responsibilities allocated as an outcome of this step.
- 3. *Local Community Participation:*** At the regional and local levels, there must be more opportunities for the local community in implementing the plan. There should be

adequate consideration of local viewpoints, equitable use of resources etc. at the local level to avoid conflicts with local community. This will need adequate consideration before implementation plans are finalised as recommended by studies such as Fraser et al. (2006). Collaboration with the local community can be achieved through several mechanisms. For example, as suggested by some participants in this study: offering the local community and SMEs shares in projects, by using local companies and entrepreneurs to carry out services related to destination development, educating, and supporting the local community to start new tourism services or attractions and to provide corporate social responsibility incentives for the local community from the private sector. Involvement of the local community in implementation of tourism projects and destination development will be vital in strengthening community awareness and their experience of tourism related benefits because of which their resistance to tourism development can be managed effectively.

4. **Monitoring:** Careful monitoring of the results against set targets must be an essential part of implementation of tourism plans to ensure effectiveness (Alnaqash, 2014). Such monitoring and evaluation must be carried out at regular intervals so that remedial action can be taken if things are not proceeding according to plan. At the national and regional levels such monitoring would be undertaken by the Tourism Council while the MoT could monitor the results of local level planning.

7.9.12 Overall comments on the FTPSC

As explained in the above sections, the proposed FTPSC (Figure 9) integrates and builds on the existing stages of planning and stakeholder participation into one comprehensive framework for stakeholder participation that addresses the problems of lack of coordination, fragmented decision-making, weak stakeholder participation as well as the top-down decision-making governance system in Oman. The inclusion of the specific government bodies which should be responsible for the planning processes at each stage as well as the various stakeholders to be included at national, regional and local levels makes the FTPSC more than just a theoretical framework, but one that has practical applicability. The level of local community participation increases so that at local levels, there is more community involvement in the implementation and management of tourism related services and projects. Moreover, while the framework is designed to address the weaknesses identified in this study,

the stages of the planning and steadier consultation process can be used in planning contexts which have similar constraints such as other non-democratic countries and destinations.

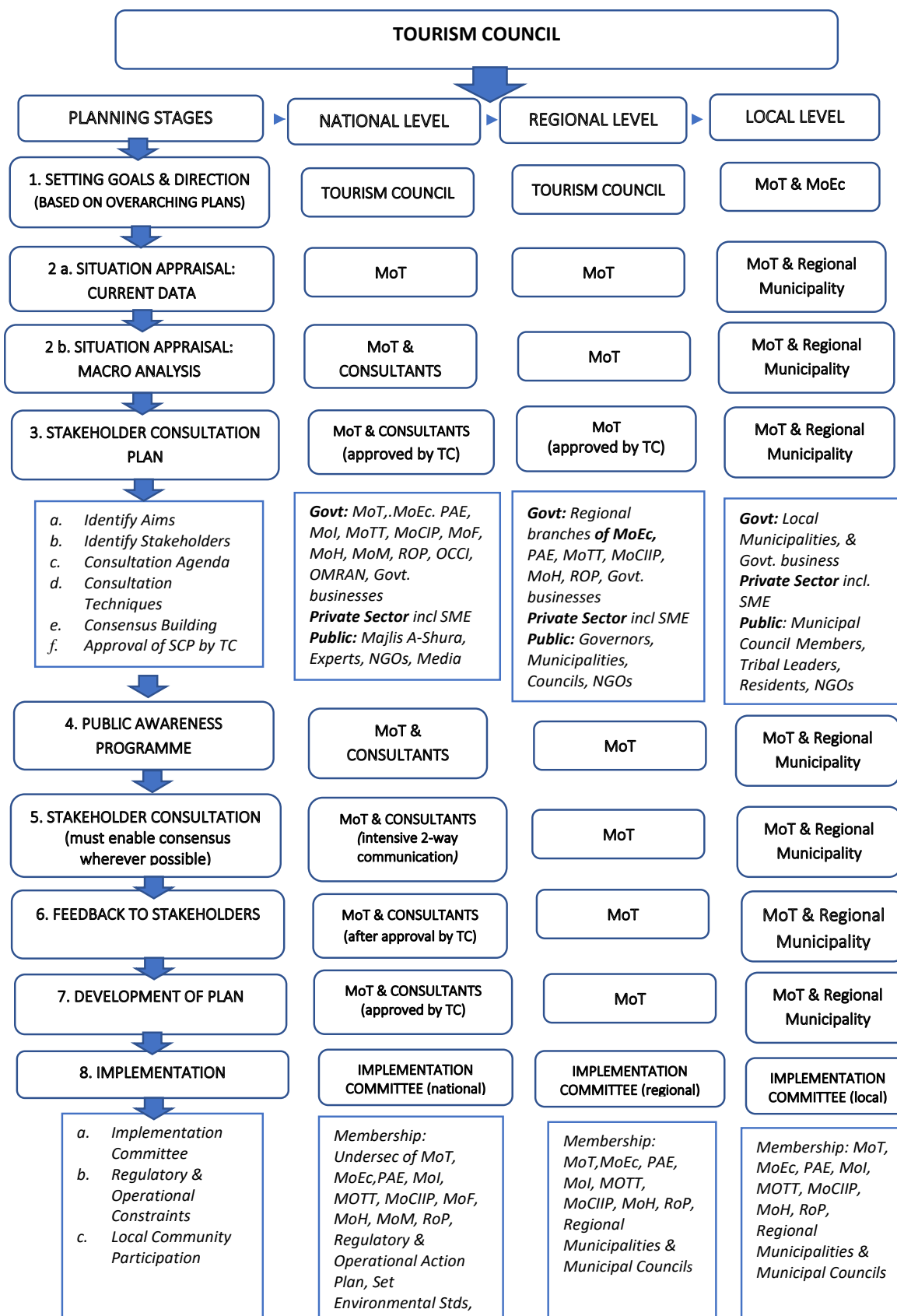


Figure 9: An Integrated Framework for Tourism Planning & Stakeholder Consultation

7.10 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the key findings from this study in relation to the theoretical underpinnings and literature on tourism planning and development and stakeholder participation. It has focused on the key issues that impact the effectiveness of Oman's tourism planning and development process and how stakeholder perspectives on participation and joint decision-making are influenced not only by their awareness of these problems but also by the political governance system. In so doing, it has addressed the first and second research objectives. The weaknesses identified by this study are in line with the literature on developing destinations which state that the governance mechanisms are often weak in relation to planning, implementation and stakeholder participation. While Omani tourism stakeholders are very enthusiastic about participating and contributing to the planning process, they prefer to leave the ultimate decision-making to the government, nevertheless they are very emphatic that such decisions incorporate their input if tourism development efforts are to be effective. To arrive at the best solutions and to address the differing viewpoints, Omani stakeholders prefer participation mechanisms whereby a level of consensus can be reached on core issues to complement the work of consultants who provide valuable expertise. They further stress that they want the government to give them feedback about the way decisions are made after the consultation process.

This chapter also presented an integrated Framework for Tourism Planning and Stakeholder Participation to address the identified weaknesses in Oman tourism planning system, stakeholder participation and implementation. There are three distinctive features of the proposed FTPSC. First the FTPSC framework innovatively integrates both the tourism planning and stakeholder participation typologies together while also highlighting key issues such as identifying of stakeholders, public education and awareness, and problems with implementation and coordination. Second, the FTPSC has been developed for non-democratic countries which can strengthen stakeholder participation within a top-down hierarchical system of governance which does not follow democratic norms. It is done in such a way that it resolves the problems of fragmentation, bureaucracy, delay, and lack of implementation that have hamstrung for decades the roll-out of a coherent tourism strategy in the country. Hence, unlike other stakeholder participation typologies or frameworks, it stops short of the complete empowerment of stakeholders in decision-making with the government in accordance with the perspectives of participants in this study. Instead, it

proposes two stages of stakeholder consultation followed by feedback to stakeholders so that they understand how their views have informed the strategies and decisions. In the absence of empowerment and joint decision-making with the government, the FTPSC also highlights the importance of mechanisms to facilitate consensus among stakeholders during the consultation process at least on core issues so that government decision making is more aligned with stakeholder input and perspectives. Third, the TPFSC proposes increased local community collaboration and involvement at the local levels of planning through appropriate incentives so that the local community, SMEs and entrepreneurs, and residents can experience the direct benefits of tourism. This will reduce the resistance to tourism development and the conflict between local communities and other stakeholders that is currently present.

Chapter 8. Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

The focus of this thesis was to understand how the tourism planning process in a non-democratic country such as the Sultanate of Oman could be strengthened through the application of a democratic concept such as stakeholder participation. It sought to do this examining tourism planning documents and by understanding the perspectives of the different tourism stakeholders on the current planning process and on the scope for future stakeholder participation in the tourism planning process. This chapter brings this thesis to a close by first summarising the main findings in relation to the research objectives. It also presents the contributions of this study, its limitations and suggestions for further research and the concluding remarks.

8.2 Summary of Findings

This study adopted a constructionist epistemology to analyse tourism stakeholders' discourse and understand the applicability and relevance of stakeholder participation in the tourism planning process in Oman. The discourse within planning documents, as well as that of different tourism stakeholders was analysed to reveal the complexities, challenges and inherent power structures and political, economic and socio-cultural contexts that are embedded within stakeholder discourse. The participants whose views were researched included representatives of different government bodies, tourism business organisations (private and government and SMEs) local communities, academia, non-governmental organisations, and media. The geographical locations of stakeholders were Muscat and Dhofar governorates which are the two main tourism governorates in Oman.

8.2.1 *Objective 1*

The first objective of this study was: **To identify the weaknesses and challenges in the current tourism planning process in Oman.**

In order to achieve the first research objective, critical discourse analysis of two government planning documents, Oman Vision 2020 and Oman Tourism Strategy (OTS) 2040 was carried out. The analysis of both documents was focused on understanding the official government perspective of the planning process including the extent of stakeholder

participation and was presented in chapter four. The critical discourse analysis revealed the extent of participation of different stakeholders in the planning process and the power structures that are at play in the planning process. A comprehensive understanding of the challenges, and weaknesses in the current tourism planning system in Oman was obtained through 45 in-depth semi-structured interviews with tourism stakeholders in Oman. Critical discourse analysis of the interviews was presented in chapter five and revealed stakeholder perspectives on and experiences with the current planning process as well as their views on how it could be improved. The key finding from the document analysis and the interviews is the undisputed control of the government in all planning related decisions and their execution. The current system of planning is hierarchical in terms of decision-making and data collection and feedback with only key stakeholders and experts having the power to provide input. Although it was found that the process became more participatory in terms of private sector involvement in the preparation of OTS 2040, the tourism planning system is confined to the more powerful stakeholders namely the government, its expert advisors, and the bigger companies with very little participation by other stakeholders. While participants from the private sector and academia perceived their own participation as satisfactory, government organisations, regional bodies, small and medium enterprises, and local community representatives stated they were not involved in the planning process but were merely presented with some of the objectives or outcomes.

The main weaknesses as perceived by stakeholders include the lack of clear direction and appropriate planning for the tourism sector, fragmented decision-making system, lack of coordination among government stakeholders leading to long bureaucratic delays in tourism development. Other challenges included the lack of relevant expertise in planning by government officials, and the shortage of government and private sector funds for tourism development. There was a level of consensus among participants on the use of international expertise in the form of consultants. This is in accordance with Tennnoy et al. (2015) who find that often decision-makers use experts to defend their plans or in Oman's case to give government plans a measure of international validity. However, the results as noted by many participants have not been satisfactory as expert-led plans or projects have not addressed the unique socio-cultural and political contexts of Oman.

The top-down hierarchical system of governance in Oman where decision-making power is vested at the very top of the hierarchy leaves the individual ministries such as the Ministry

of Tourism with little influence over other government stakeholders who also play significant roles in tourism development. As a result, the MoT is perceived as not having the required influence and power and furthermore, was criticised for not providing clear direction for the tourism sector. The of lack of power sharing and collaboration at different levels of the government hierarchy in Oman is a major constraint in planning and implementation of the plans which results in lack of coherence in planning and implementation, excessive bureaucracy and delays, and inefficient and ineffective decisions. Moreover, the interviews revealed that all stakeholder groups are aware of these weaknesses and challenges in the planning system.

8.2.2 Objective 2

The second objective of this study was: **To analyse stakeholder perspectives on a participative and inclusive approach to tourism planning and development in Oman.**

The 45 KI interviews provided the data required to achieve objective 2 by exploring stakeholders' readiness for and perspectives on an inclusive and participative approach to tourism planning in Oman. The critical discourse analysis of the interviews presented in chapter five, also shed light on stakeholders' awareness and knowledge of tourism, their experiences, and perspectives in relation to stakeholder participation, and the extent to which they felt that their opinions were considered by decision makers.

The findings reveal that all stakeholder groups show a very good level of understanding of the benefits and risks associated with tourism development. They are positive about the potential economic benefits, though, community representatives expressed disappointment that local communities are yet to see or share in these economic benefits. This is consistent with the literature that many developing countries have failed to provide sufficient benefit for their local communities from tourism. The interviews revealed a lack of power by stakeholders such as SMEs and local community representatives who are not invited to participate in the tourism development dialogue currently. This is in line with other studies that have found that tourism planning in many countries confine decision-making power to governments and powerful private interests while marginalising others. In Oman, the extent to which powerful private interests influence government decisions is not very clear since decision-making is centralised with very little transparency. It was also found that a key reason for this lack of public involvement in tourism initiatives is the perception that the

public and local communities will resist development efforts or that they are not aware or educated enough to understand the complexities of tourism to be effective participants. There is a belief that inclusion of the Omani public in planning will generate problems and conflicts. However, the discourse also reveals that there is already considerable local community resistance to tourism development as a result of their lack of effective engagement in the process.

All stakeholders expressed openness and enthusiasm for stakeholder participation in tourism planning as they saw this as a solution to address the current weaknesses as well as to ensure more effective and sustainable tourism development. Many participants noted that the future development of Oman is an important motivator for them to support the planning process as best as they can. Tourism stakeholders also emphasised that they should be involved at the beginning of the planning process and not merely be informed of plans at the end, as they felt early engagement would ensure that plans are developed with adequate input from stakeholders and therefore would address their interests or concerns.

Furthermore, stakeholders expressed the opinion that more effective engagement and coordination of all stakeholders including all the different government bodies under the supervision of an authority with real decision-making power is the solution to address the problems of fragmented decision-making and delays in implementation. Most significantly, however, while all stakeholders wanted to be more involved in the planning process, the consensus was that actual decision-making is the sole responsibility of the government. They made a clear distinction between stakeholder consultation and stakeholder participation in decision-making. They did not see a role for non-government stakeholders in making decisions, but they insisted, that the decisions made by the government should be based on stakeholder recommendations and that there should be more transparency through feedback as to why such decisions are taken.

8.2.3 Objective 3

The third objective of this study was: **To develop an integrated framework for tourism planning and stakeholder participation for Oman that addresses identified weakness and challenges and strengthens sustainability.**

In order to address the third research objective, tourism stakeholders were presented with two illustrations of the tourism planning process, Process I and Process II, and their feedback on

the perceived strengths and weaknesses of each was collected through focus group discussions. The first illustration (Process I) reflected the current tourism planning process in Oman and the second (Process II) was an augmented process of stakeholder participation that reflected the findings of the interviews with regard to the different stages of planning including implementation. The focus groups criticised Process I for not engaging with stakeholders adequately as they felt that this would lead to problems in implementation and operations further on, including cancellation or delays of tourism projects. All focus groups agreed that, the solution was to effectively engage with all stakeholders including local communities as in Process II. However, they felt that Process II was too long; there was concern that there would be further delays in the implementation of tourism projects after plans are made and this would discourage investors and the private sector. The inferred recommendation was that the time between the conceptual or planning stage and the implementation stage must be as short as possible while incorporating relevant stakeholder participation. The focus groups also recommended that delays in implementation must be addressed more effectively and that the role of consultants in Process II should be enhanced and clarified so that expert knowledge is gainfully used.

In order to achieve objective three, the feedback on Processes I and II was used to develop an integrated framework for tourism planning and stakeholder participation (FTPSC) that addresses the identified weaknesses in planning, stakeholder participation and implementation. The FTPSC is contextualised for Oman and ensures that stakeholder participation is built into the core of Oman's tourism planning system. The FTPSC consists of eight stages and provides detailed recommendations and guidelines for each stage including particular attention is given to the implementation stage as this can be problematic in tourism planning and is particularly problematic in the case of Oman.

One of the distinctive features of the FTPSC is that it has been developed for non-democratic countries and so can strengthen stakeholder participation within a top-down hierarchical system of governance which does not follow democratic norms. To directly address the lack of decision-making power of the MoT and the fragmented nature of tourism planning and development decisions, the FTPSC proposes that a special Tourism Council is assigned the responsibility of overseeing tourism planning and implementation and all related final decision-making. The Tourism Council must be assigned authority from the very top of the government's hierarchy. The Tourism Council should include top level representation of all

relevant government bodies to enable decision-making without referring to any other body. The proposed framework does not propose the complete empowerment of stakeholders or joint decision making as in other models as this would be difficult to achieve or almost impossible in a non-democratic country. Instead, it proposes two stages of stakeholder participation where stakeholder consultation is followed by feedback to stakeholders so that they understand how their views have informed the strategies and decisions. The FTPSC highlights the importance of mechanisms to enable a level of consensus among stakeholders during the consultation process. It also proposes increased local community collaboration and involvement at the local levels of planning through appropriate incentives so that the local community, SMEs and entrepreneurs and residents can experience the direct benefits of tourism. This will reduce the resistance to tourism development and the conflict between local communities and other stakeholders that is currently present. Hence, the FTPSC can enhance sustainability of tourism development in Oman as it ensures adequate and appropriate stakeholder participation at all levels and addresses the weaknesses in the planning and implementation process.

8.3 Thesis Contributions

The significance of this study centres around the argument, that if emerging destinations such as Oman are to benefit from tourism development, further attention must be given to stakeholder participation in tourism planning and development so that results are balanced and optimised. This is particularly more so as the literature on stakeholder participation in tourism within different political and socio-cultural contexts in developing countries is still evolving (Adu-Ampong, 2017; Yanes et al. 2019; Pooyan et al. 2019). The challenges within destinations, especially those relating to power structures in decision-making and stakeholder participation, the differing and conflicting priorities and inherent systemic weaknesses that affect policy initiatives, should be considered when applying tourism planning approaches. As stated in Section 1.5, Chapter 1, the main contributions of this study can be divided into three areas: theoretical contribution, case-study contribution and practical contribution which are detailed below.

Theoretical Contribution: First, this study fills a gap in the literature by examining how the stakeholder participation concept which is based on democratic norms can be applied to a non-democratic developing country. The literature on tourism development in non-democratic countries is just evolving, and currently there are no studies that have examined

the applicability of stakeholder participation within the context of government decision-making in tourism planning in non-democratic states. Hence, from a theoretical perspective, this thesis adds to our understanding of how stakeholder participation can be applied to tourism planning in developing countries with more autocratic top-down governance systems. And it improves understanding of the challenges, weakness, and power structure in tourism planning a context of non-democratic countries.

It specifically contributes to the literature by synthesising and extending existing planning and participation models into a conceptual framework that integrates stakeholder participation in tourism planning at national, regional, and local levels. It builds on existing literature on tourism planning stages as explained by Moscardo (2011) and the Public Participation Framework proposed by Marzuki and Hay (2013). The framework deviates from the existing models of stakeholder participation by replacing the empowerment and joint decision-making step with consensus building among stakeholders, as the study finds that non-governmental stakeholders do not want to be involved in the decision-making stage. This thesis, therefore, recommends that tourism policy initiatives in non-democratic countries will benefit from wider stakeholder consultation with the aim of enabling consensus building but stopping short of joint decision-making with the government. While final decisions are taken by the government, the framework requires the government to give feedback to stakeholders on its decisions and how stakeholder recommendations were considered. By merging the stakeholder participation process within a detailed framework for tourism planning, it provides a sustainable approach to tourism planning which is sufficiently detailed in terms of process to enable practical applicability.

Case-Study Knowledge: This study sheds light on how non-democratic or authoritarian governments such as in Oman and the GCC region, can present problems for tourism development in their countries because of their unfamiliarity with the multisectoral and complex nature of the tourism product. Research on tourism in the GCC countries and Oman is quite scarce while some of these countries are increasingly seeking to diversify their economy with tourism identified as a key sector in enabling this diversification (Albalushi and Wise, 2017). While several studies have investigated the weaknesses and challenges in tourism development in developing countries, the literature on the real challenges presented by differing political systems and resulting socio-cultural contexts is relatively scarce. These problems are compounded, as in the Gulf countries like Oman, as their efforts to diversify

their economies away from oil production puts additional pressure on governments to roll out tourism projects at speed which risks making mistakes that could have long-term unintended negative consequences. In such circumstances, an injection of stakeholder participation into their tourism planning systems, which is contextualised to fit in with the overall governance system has a better chance of success and can be a valuable safeguard to prevent these countries making such mistakes.

Practical Contribution: This study provides a critical look at stakeholder discourse in a region, where wider discourse regarding government planning systems and the lack thereof is not easily found. It therefore provides a rare insight into how Omani tourism stakeholders view each other and the efforts of the government in developing tourism. This study shows the crucial importance of considering the opinion of local communities in the tourism planning system. The participants in this study have been frank and direct and have expressed their views openly, which is not something that can be found easily in non-democratic systems. This is particularly valuable as the Omani government's tourism development efforts have often been met with resistance from local communities and this resistance will likely remain unless local communities are brought into the dialogue in ways which they see benefit their lives. Rather than ignoring such resistance which can seriously damage the tourism sector, the proposed framework for tourism planning and stakeholder participation offers practical solutions to government decision-makers in Oman to address issues of community acceptance of tourism. The proposed framework addresses issues of fragmented decision-making, and lack of coordination among the different government players that currently work in isolation, ensures expert involvement in the planning process, and recommends engaging with tourism stakeholders in a manner that better informs decision-making. In so doing, the framework while giving a voice and platform to all stakeholders, considers the existing governance structure in Oman, so that government organisations do not lose their power. The current power struggle between the different government organisation is dealt with by having the Royal Court lead the Tourism council wherein all key government bodies participate. Project implementation can be faster and better coordinated at all levels including the regional and local levels, where suggested implantation mechanisms can lead to positive community engagement. Moreover, by examining the perspectives of all tourism stakeholders in Oman, this study offers a comprehensive look at stakeholder discourse in comparison to most studies which, as noted by Lyon (2013) are limited to one or a maximum of three stakeholder groups.

8.4 Limitations and Future Research Avenues

This study provided critical insights into stakeholder discourse on tourism planning and stakeholder participation in Oman as an example of non-democratic countries and how the challenges unique to such countries can be addressed. Nevertheless, it is important to consider four limitations of this study before any suggestions for future studies can be made.

First, the data in this study were analysed using CDA but like all methodological tools, CDA has certain limitations. As noted in Chapter three, one of the techniques used in CDA and in this study, is reflexivity by the researcher himself where he cannot remain a neutral observer; rather the researcher's familiarity and understanding of the language, social and political systems, and that of the tourism sector, allowed for a particular interpretation of the discourse. Hence, according to Widdowson (1995), CDA may not really examine several interpretations of the discourse, as it is influenced by the ideology of the researchers themselves; researchers will inevitably identify or select texts that support their preferred meanings or interpretations. Hence, while care has been taken to present the various interpretations of stakeholder discourse in this study, the researcher's own perspectives may have unconsciously influenced some of the interpretations.

Second, although the study sheds light on the challenges in tourism planning and stakeholder participation in non-democratic political systems, care must be taken in generalising the findings of this study to other non-democratic countries even in the GCC region. In the research, there were appropriate representations of all tourism stakeholder groups and geographical areas, and the sample size is considered adequate to obtain a reliable level of diversity of views for Oman. Therefore, while the relevance of this study to Oman is not an issue, stakeholder perspectives and tourism planning systems may differ from country to country. This may be the case with the GCC or other non-democratic countries, even if they all have monarchical or autocratic systems of governance. It cannot thus be assumed that systemic weaknesses in tourism planning and stakeholder perspectives found in the Omani case will be the same in these other countries. Hence, the proposed framework for tourism planning and stakeholder participation for Oman may require future research to validate it or adapt it by applying further contextualisation to suit the unique challenges of other countries.

Third, the proposed integrated framework for tourism planning and stakeholder participation requires practical testing in real time to ensure its effectiveness in Oman. Hence, further

research should focus on ways in which the effectiveness of the framework can be evaluated and enhanced. For instance, a key step in the stakeholder participation process is stakeholder consultation leading to consensus at least on core issues. Consensus-building is a difficult process when different groups or individuals with different priorities are present and there may be particular approaches and skills sets that are required to enable participants to reach consensus. Hence, further research on ways in which consensus can be developed given the differing stakeholder priorities in planning contexts will be valuable with particular importance on how wider community participation can lead to consensus-building.

Fourth, although, some mechanisms have been suggested in the proposed framework for strengthening local community participation and involvement in tourism projects and development at the local level, additional research to identify other mechanisms and test their applicability to local communities in Oman will be valuable. Such research can provide low-hanging fruit that decision-makers can incorporate so that the local communities benefit directly and immediately from tourism development thus reducing their resistance.

8.5 Overall Conclusions

The importance of stakeholder participation within the tourism planning discourse will undoubtedly remain high because participation offers a mechanism whereby a complex sector such as tourism can be developed in an equitable and sustainable manner. However, there are many pitfalls to avoid when it comes to stakeholder participation in tourism planning. The differences between destinations are many and these lead to success or failure of their tourism policy and strategy. New destinations such as Oman have a lot of lessons to learn if they are to succeed in their efforts to develop the tourism sector as an important contributor to the national GDP. Perhaps the most important lesson is that the country needs to embrace the concept of stakeholder participation within the tourism planning process with enthusiasm and commitment. As His Majesty, the late Sultan Qaboos Bin Said, once put it:

“The success of the human experience is the result of constant endeavour, commitment, will and a sense of responsibility. No nation can realize its goals unless its people work together to build its future and develop its potential”.

References

- Aas C, Ladkin A, Fletcher J. (2005). 'Stakeholder Collaboration and Heritage Management'. *Annals of Tourism Research* 32(1), 28–48.
- Ademilokun, M.A.,(2019). 'A corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis of modality in social transformation campaigns in Nigeria'. *Discourse and Interaction*, 12(2), pp.5-28.
- Adu-Ampong, E.A., (2017). 'Divided we stand: Institutional collaboration in tourism planning and development in the Central Region of Ghana'. *Current Issues in Tourism* , 20(3), pp.295-314.
- Agger, A. (2012). 'Towards tailor-made participation: how to involve different types of citizens in participatory governance'. *Town planning review*, 83(1), pp.29-46.
- Al-Amri (2008). "*Corporate Social Responsibility: A Case Study of Zughy Resort in the Sultanate of Oman*". Unpublished PhD thesis. UK, University of Wales Institute, Cardiff.
- Al-Balushi.M. K. (2008). "*Omani Employment and the Development of Careers in the Hotel Sector in the Sultanate of Oman*". Cardiff School of Management, University of Wales Institute, Cardiff.
- Albalushi and Wise (2017). "*Tourism in the Arab World. An Industry perspective*". Series: Aspects of Tourism, 78. Edited by: Hamed Almuhrzi, Hafidh Alriyami, and Noel Scott. Channel View Publications. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781845416157>.
- Al-Busaidi, Y.q. (2010). "*Public Interpretation of Archaeological Heritage and Archaeotourism: The Case Study of the Sultanate of Oman, Issues and Approaches*". Saabrücken: Saabrücken : Lambert Academic Publishing.
- Al Droushi. A (2017). "*Discourses on the Modernisation Agenda in Sport Policy in Oman; between the Global and Local and Modernity and Authenticity*" PHD thesis Loughborough University. Austrilia.
- Al Haija, A.A. (2011). 'Jordan: Tourism and conflict with local communities'. *Habitat International*, 35(1), pp.93-100.
- Al-Hashim, A. (2015). 'Embracing sustainable tourism in Oman: Case study of Mirbat Settlement', *International Journal of Cultural and Digital Tourism*, Volume 2, No.2, Autumn 2015.
- Al Hosni, T.S.S., (2017). "*Responding to pupil differences in Oman: A study of two primary schools*". PHD thesis. University of Manchester. Faculty of Humanities. Uk.
- Alkamali, N., Alhadhrami, N. and Alalouch, C. (2017). 'Muscat City expansion and accessibility to the historical core: Space syntax analysis', *International Conference - Alternative and Renewable Energy Quest (Areq 2017)*, 115, pp. 480-486.
- Allen, G. (2011). '*Intertextuality*'. Abingdon: Routledge.

Al-Maimani, J. and Johari.(2014). 'Tourism development plan in Oman. Indicator', *Journal of Global Business and Social Entrepreneurship (GBSE)*, p.2016p.

Al-Masroori, R.S. (2006). "*Destination Competitiveness: Interrelationships between Destination Planning and Development Strategies and Stakeholders' Support in Enhancing Oman's Tourism Industry*". PhD thesis, Griffith University, Australia.

Alnaqash. M.H, (2014). "*Takteet Almawaqi Alsiyahiah*". Almaktab Aljami Alhadeeth. Egypt.

Al-Nahdi, Y.N (2016). "*Barriers to Omansiation: Analysis and policy Recommendation*". Doctoral thesis, University of Huddersfield, UK.

Alrwajfah, M.M., Almeida-García, F. and Cortés-Macías, R. (2019). 'Residents' perceptions and satisfaction toward tourism development: A case study of Petra Region, Jordan'. *Sustainability*, 11(7), p.1907.

AL-SAID, A.L. KHATTAB, G., (2019). "*Vision2020 and the Private Sector: An Analysis of Late Rentier Development Strategy in Oman*". (Doctoral dissertation, Durham University).

Alsamdani, H.A.A. (2017). "*The Jihadist discourse of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (2003-2005): representational, intertextual and argumentative analysis*" Doctoral dissertation, Newcastle University.

Al-Shaabi, S. (2011). "*Managing Local Residents' Participation in Tourism Development in the Sultanate of Oman: A Case Study of the Wave Muscat Project*". Unpublished PhD thesis. UK, Cardiff School of Management, Cardiff.

Alshboul. K. (2016). '*Assessing Local Community Involvement in Tourism Development around a Proposed World Heritage Site in Jerash, Jordan*'. Doctoral dissertation, University of Waterloo, Canada.

Al-Subhi .K. (2017). "*How effective is Oman's Fisheries Strategy Plan (OFSP) 2013-2020 for the development of the country's fisheries sector?*" PHD thesis, Newcastle University. UK. (Accessed: 6.3.2018).

AlSaiyyad, N. ed., (2013). "*Consuming tradition, manufacturing heritage: global norms and urban forms in the age of tourism*". Routledge. London.

Al-Tokhais, A. and Thapa, B. (2019). 'Stakeholder perspectives towards national parks and protected areas in Saudi Arabia', *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 11(8), pp p.2323.

Amara, D. (2016). 'Re-branding tourism hotspots after crisis: The case of Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt'. *International Journal of Advanced Scientific Research and Management* 11(1), 35-44.

Amran, A., Zain, M.M., Sulaiman, M., Sarker, T. and Ooi, S.K., (2013). 'Empowering society for better corporate social responsibility (CSR): The case of Malaysia'. *Kajian Malaysia*, 31(1), p.57.

- Andriotis, K., Stylidis, D. and Weidenfeld, A. eds., (2018). "*Tourism policy and planning implementation: Issues and challenges*". Routledge.
- Angella, F. and Go, F.M. (2009). 'Tale of two cities' collaborative tourism marketing: Towards a theory of destination stakeholder assessment'. *Tourism Management*, 30(3), pp. 429-440.
- Araujo, L. M. D., & Bramwell, B (1999). 'Stakeholders assessments and collaborative tourism planning: the case of Brazil's Costa Dourada project'. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 7 (3-4), P 256-378.
- Arnstein, S.R. (1969). 'A ladder of citizen participation', *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 35(4), pp. 216-224.
- Aronsson, L. (2000). "*The development of sustainable tourism*". London: Continuum.
- Aulia, S. and Almandhari, A. (2015). 'Opportunities of tourism in Sultanate of Oman', *International Journal of Research in Tourism and Hospitality* 1(2), pp. 13-15.
- Azeiteiro, U.M., Alves, F., de Moura, A.P., Pardal, M.Â., Pita, C., Chuenpagdee, R. and Pierce, G.J. (2012). 'Participatory issues in fisheries governance in Europe'. *Management of Environmental Quality: An International Journal*, 23 (4). pp. 347-361.
- Battaglia, M., Daddi, T. and Rizzi, F. (2012). 'Sustainable tourism planning and consultation: evidence from the project INTER. ECO. TUR'. *European Planning Studies*, 20(2), pp.193-211.
- Beeton, S. (2006). "*Community Development Through Tourism*". Landlinks Press, Collingwood, Australia.
- Begg, C. (2018). 'Power, responsibility and justice: a review of local stakeholder participation in European flood risk management'. *Local Environment*, 23(4), pp.383-397.
- Bellinger, N. (2020). 'Political parties and citizens' well-being among non-democratic developing countries'. *Party Politics*, p.1354068820934013.
- Bello, F.G., Lovelock, B. and Carr, N. (2018). 'Enhancing community participation in tourism planning associated with protected areas in developing countries: Lessons from Malawi'. *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 18(3), pp.309-320.
- Bello, F.G., Carr, N. and Lovelock, B. (2016). 'Community participation framework for protected area-based tourism planning', *Tourism Planning & Development*, 13(4), pp. 469-485.
- Belwal, R. and Belwal, S. (2010). 'Economic growth and tourism in the post oil Omani economy: A strategic analysis', *Journal of Tourism Challenges and Trends*, 3(1), pp. 165-187.
- Benur, A.M. and Bramwell, B. (2015). 'Tourism product development and product diversification in destinations', *Tourism Management*, 50, pp. 213-224.

- Bernard, H.R. and Bernard, H.R. (2013). "*Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approach*". Sage.
- Besley, T. and Persson, T. (2014). 'Why do developing countries tax so little?'. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 28(4), pp.99-120.
- Bianchi, R. (2018). 'The political economy of tourism development: A critical review'. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 70, pp.88-102.
- Bishop, J., Davison, I., Hickling, D., Kean, J., Rose, J. and Silson, R. (1994). "*Community Involvement in Planning and Development Processes*". London: HMSO.
- Bleasdale, S. (2006). 'Connecting paradise: Culture and tourism in Tunisia', *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 27(4), pp. 447-460.
- Blommaert, J. (2005). "*Discourse: A Critical Introduction*". Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Bobbio, L., (2019). 'Designing effective public participation'. *Policy and Society*, 38(1), pp.41-57.
- Bontenbal, M. and Aziz, H. (2013). 'Oman's Tourism Industry: Student Career Perceptions and Attitudes'. *Journal of Arabian Studies*, 3(2), pp.232-248.
- Boon, E., Bawole, J.N. and Ahenkan, A., (2013). 'Stakeholder participation in community development projects: an analysis of the quadripartite model of the International Centre for Enterprise and Sustainable Development (ICED) in Ghana'. *Community development*, 44(1), pp.38-54.
- Bramwell, B. 35 (2010). 'Participative planning and governance for sustainable tourism'. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 35(3), pp. 239-249.
- Bramwell, B., (2015). 'Theoretical activity in sustainable tourism research'. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 54 (C), pp.204–218.
- Bramwell, B. and Lane, B. (2000). "*Tourism Collaboration and Partnership: Politics, Practice and Sustainability*". Clevedon: Clevedon : Channel View.
- Bramwell, B. and Lane, B. (2011). 'Critical research on the governance of tourism and sustainability', *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 19(4-5), pp. 411-421.
- Bramwell, B. and Sharman, A. (1999). 'Collaboration in local tourism policymaking', *Annals of Tourism Research*, 26(2), pp. 392-415.
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006). 'Using thematic analysis in psychology'. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), pp.77-101.
- Buckley, R. (2012). 'Sustainable tourism: research and reality'. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 39(2), 528-546.

Brundtland Commission. (1987). "*Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our common future*". retrived [Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development Our Common Future - A 42 427 Annex - UN Documents Cooperation Circles \(ask-force.org\)](#). Accessed on 22.1.2021.

Bryman, A. (2008). "*Social Research Methods*". 3rd ed.. edn. New York: New York : Oxford University Press.

Bryman, A. (2012). "*Social Research Methods*". 4th ed.. edn. Oxford: Oxford : Oxford University Press.

Bryson, J.M., Quick, K.S., Slotterback, C.S. and Crosby, B.C., 2013. Designing public participation processes. *Public administration review*, 73(1), pp.23-34.

Buhalis, D. (2000). 'Marketing the competitive destination of the future', *Tourism Management*, 21(1), pp. 97-116.

Burns, G.L. and Howard, P. (2003). 'When wildlife tourism goes wrong: A case study of stakeholder and management issues regarding Dingoes on Fraser Island, Australia', *Tourism Management*, 24(6), pp. 699-712.

Burns, P.M. (2004). 'Tourism Planning: A third way?', *Annals of Tourism Research*, 31(1), pp. 24-43.

Burns, P., Ritchie, B.W. and Palmer, C. (2005). "*Tourism Research Methods: Integrating Theory with Practice*". Wallingford, Oxfordshire, UK: C.A.B. International, issuing body.

Burton, P. and Mustelin, J. (2013). 'Planning for climate change: is greater public participation the key to success?'. *Urban Policy and Research*, 31(4), pp.399-415.

Byrd, E. T. (2007). 'Stakeholders in sustainable tourism development and their roles: applying stakeholder theory to sustainable tourism development', *Tourism Review*, 62(2), pp. 6-13.

Byrd, E.T., Bosley, H.E., & Dronberger, M.G. (2009). 'Comparisons of stakeholder perceptions of tourism impacts in rural eastern North Carolina'. *Tourism Management*, 30, 693–703.

Cao, X., (2015). 'Challenges and potential improvements in the policy and regulatory framework for sustainable tourism planning in China: The case of Shanxi Province'. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 23(3), pp.455-476.

Carr, N. (2002) 'A comparative analysis of the behaviour of domestic and international young tourists', *Tourism Management*, 23(3), pp. 321-325.

Carlos, A.R.G., Monica, V.V., Maria, A.S.N. and Kennedy, M.O. (2013). 'Ecotourism in developing countries: a critical analysis of the promise, the reality and the future'. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Economics and Management Sciences*, 4(5), pp.481-486.

Carver, T. (2002). 'Discourse analysis and the linguistic turn'. *European Political Science* 2(1), pp.50-53.

- Cassell, C. and Symon, G. eds. (2004). "*Essential guide to qualitative methods in organizational research*". Sage.London.
- Chaperon, S., (2016). 'Dependency theory, tourism'. *In 'Encyclopedia of Tourism'* Jafari, Jafar, Xiao, Honggen (Eds.). Springer International Publishing, Switzerland.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-01669-6_419-1. Accessed on 9.12.2020.
- Chase, L.C., Amsden, B. and Phillips, R.G. (2012.) 'Stakeholder engagement in tourism planning and development', in *Handbook of Tourism and Quality-of-Life Research*. Springer, New York, pp. 475-490.
- Chili, N.S. and Ngxongo, N.A. (2017). 'Challenges to active community involvement in tourism development at Didima Resort—a case study of Umhlwazini community in Bergville'. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, 6(2), pp.1-15.
- Choi, H.C. and Murray, I. (2010). 'Resident attitudes toward sustainable community tourism', *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 18(4), pp. 575-594.
- Christou, L. (2012). 'Is it possible to combine mass tourism with alternative forms of tourism: The case of Spain, Greece, Slovenia and Croatia'. *Journal of Business Administration Online*, 11(1), pp.1-8.
- Clarkson, M. (1995). 'A stakeholder framework for analyzing and evaluating corporate social performance', *Academy of Management Review*, 20(1), pp. 92-117.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2007). "*Research methods in education*". (6th ed.) Abingdon: Routledge.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2011). "*Research methods in education*". (7th ed.) Abingdon: Routledge.
- Cohen, L. (2018). "*Research Methods in Education*". Eighth edn. New York: Routledge.
- Cornwall, A. and Coelho, V.S. (2007). "*Spaces for Change?: The Politics of Citizen Participation in New Democratic Arenas*". London, New York Zed Books.
- Costa, C. (2019). 'Tourism planning: a perspective paper'. *Tourism review*.75 (1), pp. 198-202.
- Crane, A. and Ruebottom, T. (2012). 'Stakeholder theory and social identity: Rethinking stakeholder identification', *Journal of Business Ethics*, 102(1), pp. 77-87.
- Creswell, J.W. (2012). "*Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative research*". 4th edn. Boston: Pearson.
- Crotty, M. (1998). "*The Foundation of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in The Research Process*". London, Sage Publication.
- Cullingworth, B., & Craves, R. W. (2009). "*Planning in the USA: Policies, issues, and processes*". New York: Routledge.

- Dabphet Siripen, (2012). 'The key stakeholders in the implementation of sustainable tourism development in two rural towns of Thailand'" *In the International Conference on Tourism, Transport and Logistics Challenges and Opportunities of Increasing Global Connectivity*, Paris. Retrieved from http://www.ijbts-journal.com/images/main_1366796758/0029-Siripen.pdf.
- Dedeke, A.N., (2017). 'Creating sustainable tourism ventures in protected areas: An actor-network theory analysis'. *Tourism management*, 61, pp.161-172.
- De Marchi, G., Lucertini, G. and Tsoukiàs, A., (2016). 'From evidence-based policy making to policy analytics'. *Annals of Operations Research*, 236(1), pp.15-38.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). "Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research". In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (p. 1–32). Sage Publications Ltd.
- Dodds, R., Graci, S.R and Holms, M., (2010). 'Does the tourist care? A comparison of tourists in Koh Phi Phi, Thailand and Gili Trawangan, Indonesia'. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 18(2), pp.207-222.
- Dodds, R. (2007). 'Sustainable tourism and policy implementation: Lessons from the case of Calvia, Spain'. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 296-322.
- Drazkiewicz, A., Challies, E. and Newig, J. (2015). 'Public participation and local environmental planning: Testing factors influencing decision quality and implementation in four case studies from Germany'. *Land use policy*, 46, pp.211-222.
- Dredge, D. (2006). 'Policy networks and the local organisation of tourism', *Tourism Management*, 27(2), pp. 269– 280.
- Dredge, D. and Jamal, T. (2015). 'Progress in tourism planning and policy: A post-structural perspective on knowledge production'. *Tourism Management*, 51, pp.285-297.
- Dupeyras, A. and MacCallum, N. (2013). "Indicators for measuring competitiveness in tourism: A guidance document". *OECD Tourism Papers*". 2013/02, OECD Publishing, Paris. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5k47t9q2t923-en>.
- Dryzek, J. (1997). "The Politics of the Earth: Environmental Discourses, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Easterby-Smith, M., R. Thorpe, and Lowe, A (2002). "Management Research: An Introduction" (2nd edition), London ,Sage Publications.
- Edelenbos, J. and Klijn, E.H., (2006). 'Managing stakeholder involvement in decision making: A comparative analysis of six interactive processes in the Netherlands'. *Journal of public administration research and theory*, 16(3), pp.417-446.
- Ehigiamusoe, Kizito Uyi.(2020) "Tourism, growth and environment: analysis of non-linear and moderating effects. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 28, no. 8 (2020): 1174-1192.

Eshliki, S.A. and Kaboudi, M. (2012). 'Community perception of tourism impacts and their participation in tourism planning: A case study of Ramsar, Iran', *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 36, pp. 333-341.

Eskerod, P., Huemann, M. and Ringhofer, C. (2015). 'Stakeholder Inclusiveness: Enriching Project Management with General Stakeholder Theory'. *Project Management Journal*, 46(6), pp.42-53.

Fairclough, N. (1992). '*Discourse and Social Change*'. Cambridge: Polity.

Feighery, W.G. (2012). 'Tourism and self-orientalism in Oman: A critical discourse analysis'. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 9(3), pp. 269-284.

Fiorino (1990) 'Citizen participation and environmental risk: A survey of institutional mechanisms'. *Science, Technology, & Human Values*, 15(2), pp. 226-43.

Florida, A. (2013). 'Participatory democracy versus deliberative democracy: elements for a possible theoretical genealogy. Two histories, some intersections'. In *7th ECPR general conference*, Bordeaux. 4-7 September 2013.

Font, J., Wojcieszak, M. and Navarro, C.J., (2015). 'Participation, representation and expertise: Citizen preferences for political decision-making processes'. *Political Studies*, 63, pp.153-172.

France, L. (1998). 'participation in tourism in the West Indian Islands'. In *Embracing and managing change in tourism: International case studies* Edited by: Laws, E., Faulkner, B. and Moscardo, G. 222–234. London: Routledge.

Fraser, E.D.G., Dougill, A.J., Mabee, W.E., Reed, M. and McAlpine, P. (2006). 'Bottom up and top down: Analysis of participatory processes for sustainability indicator identification as a pathway to community empowerment and sustainable environmental management', *Journal of Environmental Management*, 78(2), pp. 114-127.

Freeman, R.E. (1984). "*Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*". Marshfield, MA; University of Minnesota: Pitman.

Freeman, R. E., Phillips, R., & Sisodia, R. (2020). 'Tensions in stakeholder theory'. *Business & Society*, 59(2), 213-231.

Friel, M. (2002) 'The business of tourism'. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 4(3), pp. 256-257.2P.

Fulcher, R. (2010). "*Critical Discourse Analysis*". London and New York. Longman.

Furlong, P. and Marsh, D., (2007). 'On ontological and epistemological gatekeeping: a response to Bates and Jenkins'. *Politics*, 27(3), pp.204-207.207.

Gallo, M., Malovrh, Š.P., Laktić, T., De Meo, I. and Paletto, A., (2018). 'Collaboration and conflicts between stakeholders in drafting the Natura 2000 Management Programme (2015–2020) in Slovenia'. *Journal for nature conservation*, 42, pp.36-44.

Gee, P. (2011). "*How to do discourse analysis: a toolkit*". Abingdon: Routledge.

- Gee, J.P. and Handford, M. (2013). '*Handbook of Discourse Analysis*' London: Routledge.
- Gee, J.P. (2014). "*Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Methods*". 4th edition. London: Routledge.
- Getz, D. (1986). 'Models in tourism planning: Towards integration of theory and practice', *Tourism Management*, 7(1), pp. 21-32.
- Gillen, J. and Petersen, A., (2005). 'Discourse analysis. *Research methods in the social sciences*, 146, p.53.
- Ghubash, H. (2006). "*Oman – The Islamic Democratic Tradition*". Oxford: Routledge.
- Gopakumar, K. (1995). 'The entrepreneur in economic thought', *Journal of Entrepreneurship*, 4(1), p. 1-17.
- Graci, S., (2013). 'Collaboration and partnership development for sustainable tourism'. *Tourism Geographies*, 15(1), pp.25-42.
- Gunn, C.A. (1994). "*Tourism Planning: Basics, Concepts, Cases*". Washington, D.C.: Taylor & Francis.
- Gutmann, A. and Thompson, D.F., (2009). "*Why deliberative democracy?*". Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Habermas, J. (1981). "*Theory of Communicative Action*". Boston, Beacon Press.
- Habsi, A. (2004). "*Oman from Exploration to Tourism: The Images of the Country in Early Travellers*". PhD thesis, Univesity of Luton.
- Hajer, M., (2002). 'Discourse analysis and the study of policy making'. *European Political Science*, 2(1), pp.61-65.
- Hall, C.M. (2011). 'Policy learning and policy failure in sustainable tourism governance: From first- and second-order to third-order change?' *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 19(4-5), 649-671.
- Hall, C. (2008). "*Tourism Planning: Policies, Processes and Relationships*". 2nd edn. London and New York: Pearson Education.
- Hannam, K. and Knox, D., (2005). 'Discourse analysis in tourism research a critical perspective'. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 30(2), pp.23-30.
- Hammersley, M., (2002). '*Discourse Analysis: A Bibliographical Guide*'. (online resource) <http://discourseanalysis.bokee.com/inc/20050120231555563641.pdf>. Accessed on 1.3.2021
- Haque, A., Patnaik, A. and Ali, M. (2016). 'Contribution of the tourism sector to Oman's GDP', *International Journal of Economics, Commerce and Mangement*, IV(7) pp. 185-195.
- Harrill, R. (2004). 'Residents' attitudes toward tourism development: A literature review with implications for tourism planning'. *J. Plan. Lit.*, 18, 251–266.

- Hatipoglu, B., Alvarez, M.D. and Ertuna, B., (2016). 'Barriers to stakeholder involvement in the planning of sustainable tourism: The case of the Thrace region in Turkey'. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 111, pp.306-317.
- Hay, I. and James, J. (2012). 'Public participation shortcomings in tourism planning: The case of the Langkawi Islands, Malaysia AU - Marzuki, Azizan', *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 20(4), pp. 585-602.
- Head, B.W., (2008). 'Three lenses of evidence-based policy'. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 67(1), pp.1-11.
- Healey, P. (1992). 'Planning through debate: The communicative turn in planning theory', *Town Planning Review*, 63(2), pp. 143-162.
- Healey, P. (1996). 'Consensus-building across difficult divisions: New approaches to collaborative strategy making', *Planning Practice and Research*, 11(2), pp. 207-216.
- Healey, P. (1997). "*Collaborative Planning: Shaping Places in Fragmented Societies*". England: Houndsmills, Macmillan.
- Healey, P. (1998). 'Collaborative planning in a stakeholder society', *Town Planning Review*, 69(1), pp. 1-21.
- Healey, P. (2006). "*Collaborative Planning: Shaping Places in Fragmented Societies*". 2nd ed.. New York : Palgrave Macmillan.
- Healy, N., Rau, H. and McDonagh, J. (2012). 'Collaborative tourism planning in Ireland: Tokenistic consultation and the politics of participation'. *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning*, 14(4), pp.450-471.
- Henderson, J.C. (2015). 'The development of tourist destinations in the Gulf: Oman and Qatar compared', *Tourism Planning & Development*, 12(3), pp. 350-361.
- Heras M, Tàbara JD (2014). 'Let's play transformations! Performative methods for sustainability'. *sustainability science* 9(3):379–398.
- Hildebrandt, A., Al Afi, M., Amerjeed, M., Shammass, M. and Eltahir, E.A., (2007). 'Ecohydrology of a seasonal cloud forest in Dhofar: 1. Field experiment'. *Water Resources Research*, 43(10).
- His Majesty The Late Sultan Qaboos bin Said (2021). "*Excerpts from the Speeches of The Consulate*". General Consulate of the Sultanate of Oman, Australia. Retrieved from <https://oman.org.au/speeches/>. Accessed on 21.2.201.
- Hörisch, J., Freeman, R.E. and Schaltegger, S., (2014). 'Applying stakeholder theory in sustainability management: Links, similarities, dissimilarities, and a conceptual framework'. *Organization & Environment*, 27(4), pp.328-346.
- Hrubcova, G., Loster, T. and Obergruber, P. (2016). 'The taxonomy of the least developed countries based on the tourism economic impact analysis', *Procedia Economics and Finance*, 39, pp. 446-450.

- Ibrahim, Z, (2013). "A Framework for Assessing National Tourism Plans". PHD Thesis presented to the University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, retrieved from <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/144146495.pdf>.
- Inskeep, E. (1991) "*Tourism Planning: An Integrated and Sustainable Development Approach*". New York: J. Wiley.
- Inskeep, E. (1994). "*National and Regional Tourism Planning: Methodologies and Case Studies*". London: Routledge.
- Iorio, M. and Corsale, A., (2014). 'Community-based tourism and networking: Viscri, Romania'. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 22(2), pp.234-255.
- Jamal, T.B. and Getz, D. (1995). 'Collaboration theory and community tourism planning', *Annals of Tourism Research*, 22(1), pp. 186-204.
- Jamal, T. and Getz, D. (1999). 'Community roundtables for tourism-related conflicts: The dialectics of consensus and process structures', *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 7(3-4), pp. 290-313.
- Jaspal R. (2020). 'Content analysis, thematic analysis and discourse analysis'. In Glynis M Breakwell, Daniel B. Wright, Julie Barnett. *Research methods in psychology*. Sage Publication. pp.285-312.
- Jenkins, C.L. (2015) 'Tourism policy and planning for developing countries: Some critical issues', *Tourism Recreation Research*, 40(2), pp. 1-13.
- Jiang, Y. and Ritchie, B.W. (2017). 'Disaster collaboration in tourism: Motives, impediments and success factors', *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 31, pp. 70-82.
- Johnson, H. and Wilson, G., (2000). 'Biting the bullet: civil society, social learning and the transformation of local governance'. *World development*, 28(11), pp.1891-1906.
- Jones, J. and Ridout, N., (2005). 'Democratic development in Oman'. *The Middle East Journal*, 59(3), pp.376-392.
- Jordan, E.J., Vogt, C.A., Kruger, L.E. and Grewe, N. (2013). "The interplay of governance, power and citizen participation in community tourism planning", *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events*, Vol. 5 No. 3, pp. 270-288.
- Kapera, I. (2018). 'Sustainable tourism development efforts by local governments in Poland'. *Sustainable cities and society*, 40, pp.581-588.
- Karl, H., Susskind, L. and Wallace, K. (2007). 'A dialogue, not a diatribe: Effective integration of science and policy through joint fact finding'. *Environment*, 49(1): 20–34.
- Kealiikanakaoleohaililani K, Giardina CP (2016). 'Embracing the sacred: an indigenous framework for tomorrow's' *sustainability science*. 11(1):57–67
- Keogh, B. (1990). 'Public participation in community tourism planning', *Annals of Tourism Research*, 17(3), pp. 449-465.

Kessler, B.L., (2004). 'Stakeholder participation a synthesis of current literature'. National Marine Protected Areas. available at (repository.library.noaa.gov).

Khazaei, A., Elliot, S. and Joppe, M., (2015). 'An application of stakeholder theory to advance community participation in tourism planning: The case for engaging immigrants as fringe stakeholders'. *Journal of sustainable tourism*, 23(7), pp.1049-1062.

King, M.F. and Bruner, G.C., (2000). 'Social desirability bias: A neglected aspect of validity testing'. *Psychology & Marketing*, 17(2), pp.79-103.

King, C., & Horrocks, N. (2010). "Interviews in qualitative research". London: Sage.

Kumar, J. (2017). 'Municipal council elections in Oman, 2016', *Contemporary Review of the Middle East*, 4(4), pp. 385-390.

Kvale, S. (1983). 'The qualitative interview: a phenomenological and hermeneutical mode of understanding'. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 14(1), 171-196.

Kvale, S. (1996). "Interviews: an introduction to qualitative research interviewing". London: Sage.

Ladkin, A. and Bertramini, A.M. (2002). 'Collaborative tourism planning: A case study of Cusco, Peru', *Current Issues in Tourism*, 5(2), pp. 71-93.

Lai, K., Li, Y. and Feng, X. (2006). 'Gap between tourism planning and implementation: A case of China', *Tourism Management*, 27(6), pp. 1171-1180.

Lawless, B. and Chen, Y. (2019). 'Developing a Method of Critical Thematic Analysis for Qualitative Communication Inquiry'. *Howard Journal of Communications*,30:1, 92-106.

Lawson, T. (2019). "The Nature of Social Reality: Issues in Social Ontology". London and New York: Routledge.

Lee, J.W. and Brahmastre, T. (2016). 'Tourism effects on the environment and economic sustainability of sub-Saharan Africa', *International Journal of Sustainable Development & World Ecology*, 23(3), pp. 221-232.

Lemke, J. (1995). "Textual Politics: Discourse and Social Dynamics". London: Taylor & Francis.

Lew, A.A., (2017). 'Tourism planning and place making: place-making or placemaking?'. *Tourism Geographies*, 19(3), pp.448-466.

Lew, A.A., Hall, C.M. and Williams, A.M. (2004). "A Companion to Tourism". Oxford : Blackwell.

Lewis, M.W. (2015). "Dhofar: Religion, Rebellion, and Reconstruction". Available at: <http://www.geocurrents.info/geopolitics/insurgencies/dhofar-religion-rebellion-and-reconstruction> (Accessed: 29.11.2019).

- Li, W., Feng, T., Timmermans, H.J., Li, Z., Zhang, M. and Li, B., (2020). 'Analysis of citizens' motivation and participation intention in urban planning'. *Cities*, 106, p.102921.
- Lin, D. and Simmons, D., (2017). 'Structured inter-network collaboration: Public participation in tourism planning in Southern China'. *Tourism Management*, 63, pp.315-328.
- Li, W. (2006). 'Community decision-making participation in development', *Annals of Tourism Research*, 33(1), pp. 132-143.
- Locke, T. (2004). "Critical Discourse Analysis". London: Cromwell Press.
- Loumou, A., Giourga, C., Dimitrakopoulos, P. and Koukoulas, S. (2000). 'Profile: Tourism contribution to agro-ecosystems conservation: The case of Lesbos Island, Greece', *Environ Manage*, 26(4), pp. 363-370.
- Lyon, A.P. (2013). 'Tourism and sustainable development: active stakeholder discourses in the Waterberg Biosphere Reserve, South Africa' PhD Thesis, University of Liverpool, UK
- Maiden, J.A. (2008). "Participation in Sustainable Tourism Development: Stakeholders & Partnership Working". Cardiff University (United Kingdom) [Online]. Available at: <https://orca.cf.ac.uk/55742/1/U584263.pdf> (Accessed: 31.7.2019).
- Maree, K. and Van der Westhuizen, C.N., (2009). "Head start in designing research proposals in the social sciences". Juta and Company Ltd.
- Margerum, R.D. (2002). 'Collaborative planning: Building consensus and building a distinct model for practice'. *Journal of planning education and research*, 21(3), pp.237-253.
- Marzuki, A., Hay, I. and James, J. (2012). 'Public participation shortcomings in tourism planning: The case of the Langkawi Islands, Malaysia', *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 20(4), pp. 585-602.
- Marzuki, A. and Hay, I. (2013). 'Towards a public participation framework in tourism planning', *Tourism Planning & Development*, 10(4), pp. 494-512.
- Marzuki, A. (2015). 'Challenges in the Public Participation and the Decision Making Process'. *Sociologija i prostor/Sociology & Space*, 53(1), 21-39.
- Mason, P., Augustyn, M. and Seakhoa-King, A. (2010). 'Exploratory study in tourism: designing an initial, qualitative phase of sequenced, mixed methods research', *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 12(5), pp. 432-448.
- Mathieson, A. and Wall, G. (1982). "Tourism: Economic, Physical and Social Impacts. London; Longman.
- McCann, J.E. (1983). 'Design guidelines for social problem-solving interventions', *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 19(2), pp. 177-189.
- McGregor, S.L., (2003). 'Critical discourse analysis: A primer'. In *Kappa Omicron Nu forum* (Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 15-1).

- McKercher, B., Ho, P.S. and Du Cros, H. (2005). 'Relationship between tourism and cultural heritage management: evidence from Hong Kong', *Tourism Management*, 26(4), pp. 539-548.
- McNamara, C. (1999). "*General Guidelines for Conducting Interviews*". Authenticity Consulting, LLC, www.managementhelp.org/evaluatn/intrview.htm.
- Meissner, A.M., Christiansen, F., Martinez, E., Pawley, M.D.M., Orams, M.B. and Stockin, K.A. (2015). 'Behavioural effects of tourism on oceanic common dolphins, *Delphinus* sp., in New Zealand: The effects of Markov analysis variations and current tour operator compliance with regulations'. *PLoS ONE*, 10(1).
- Mershen, B. (2007). 'Development of community-based tourism in Oman: challenges and opportunities', in Daher, R.F. (ed.) *Tourism in the Middle East: Community Change and Transformation*. Clevedon, Channel View Publication: Clevedon.
- Midgley, J., Hall, A., Hardiman, M., Narine, D. (1986). "*Community Participation, Social Development, and the State*". London, Methuen.
- Miller, R.L. and Brewer, J.D. eds. (2003). "*The AZ of social research: A dictionary of key social science research concepts*". Sage online publication.
- Miller TR, Wiek A, Sarewitz D, Robinson J, Olsson L, Kriebel D, Loorbach D (2014). 'The future of sustainability science: a solutions-oriented research agenda'. *sustainability science* 9(2):239–246.
- Ministry of Manpower (2019). '*Travel and Tourism report*'. ed403dcc-1a5d-4786-abad-f0e67ccf30e9.pdf. Accessed on 29.11.2020.
- MoF. (2020). "*Council of Ministers*" – Ministry of Foreign Affairs FM.gov.om accessed on 29.1.2021.
- Mogashoa, T (2014). 'Understanding Critical Discourse Analysis in Qualitative Research'. *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE)* Volume 1, Issue 7, July 2014, PP 104-113.
- MoI (2020). "*About Oman*". Ministry of Information, Oman. Available at: <https://omaninfo.om/oman> (Accessed: 23/0/2020).
- MoJLA. (2021). *نزع الملكية للمنفعة العامة (4).pdf*. Ministry of Justice and Legal affairs. Accessed on 1.3.2021.
- Molina-Azorín, J.F. and Font, X. (2016). 'Mixed methods in sustainable tourism research: an analysis of prevalence, designs and application in JOST (2005–2014)', *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 24(4), pp. 549-573.
- MoNE. (2007). "*Vision for Oman's Economy 2020*". Ministry of National Economy, Oman.
- Moon, K. and Blackman, D., (2017). *A guide to ontology, epistemology, and philosophical perspectives for interdisciplinary researchers*. Integration and Implementation Insights.

- Morgan, A. (2010). 'Discourse analysis: An overview for the Neophyte Researcher'. *Journal of Health and Social Care Improvement*. Vol. 1:1-7.
- Morpeth, N.D. and Hongliang, Y. (eds.) (2015). "*Planning for Tourism: Towards a Sustainable Future*". Wallingford, Oxfordshire: CABI.
- Moscardo, G. (2008). "*Building Community Capacity for Tourism Development*". Computer program]. Wallingford, Oxfordshire, UK:CABI.
- Moscardo, G. (2011). 'Exploring social representations of tourism planning: issues for governance', *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 19(4-5), pp. 423-436.
- MoT (2017). '*About Sultanate of Oman*'. ministry of Tourism, Oman. Available at: <http://www.omantourism.gov.om/wps/portal/mot/tourism/oman/home/sultanate/facts/> (Accessed: 05/04/2017).
- MoTC, (2019). "*Oman Councils*". Ministry of Technology and Communication, Home (omanportal.gov.om). Accessed on 22.2.2021.
- Murphy, P., & Price, G. (2005). "*Tourism and sustainable development. In Theobald, W. (Ed.)'. Global tourism*". (3rd ed., pp. 167-193). Burlington, MA: Elsevier.
- NCSI.. (2019). "*Musahamat Qita Alysaha Fi Alnatig Almahli*". National Center for Statistics and Information Available at [تفاصيل المؤشر \(ncsi.gov.om\)](https://ncsi.gov.om). Accessed on 3.3.2021.
- Noel Healy , Henrike Rau & John McDonagh (2012). 'Collaborative Tourism Planning in Ireland: Tokenistic Consultation and the Politics of Participation'. *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning*, Vol. 14, No. 4, December 2012, 450–471
- Novelli, M. (2005). "*Niche tourism contemporary issues, trends and cases*". Available at: <https://books.google.co.uk/books> (Accessed: 19.1.2018).
- Ogaboh Agba, A.M., Ikoh, M.U., Bassey, A.O. and Ushie, E.M. (2010). 'Tourism industry impact on Efik's culture, Nigeria', *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 4(4), pp. 355-365.
- Okazaki, E. (2008) 'A community-based tourism model: Its conception and use', *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 16(5), pp. 511-529.
- Padin, C. (2012). 'A sustainable tourism planning model: components and relationships', *European Business Review*, 24(6), pp. 510-518.
- Pawson, R., (2006). "*Evidence-based policy: a realist perspective*". sage.
- Perkumienė, D. and Pranskūnienė, R. (2019). 'Overtourism: Between the right to travel and residents' rights'. *Sustainability*, 11(7), p.2138.
- Phillips, D.C., and Burbules, N.C., (2000). 'Postpositivism and educational research'. Rowman & Littlefield.

Phillips, S.G. and Hunt, J.S., (2017). 'Without Sultan Qaboos, We Would Be Yemen': The Renaissance Narrative and the Political Settlement in Oman'. *Journal of International Development*. 29(5), pp.645-660.

Pita, C., Pierce, G.J. and Theodossiou, I., (2010). 'Stakeholders' participation in the fisheries management decision-making process: fishers' perceptions of participation'. *Marine policy*, 34(5), pp.1093-1102.

Pjerotić, L., Rađenović, M. and Tripković-Marković, A. (2016). "Stakeholder collaboration in tourism destination planning – the case of Montenegro", *economics*, Vol. 4 No. 1, pp. 119-136.

Pooyan Sedarati, Sérgio Santos & Pedro Pintassilgo (2019). 'System Dynamics in Tourism Planning and Development', *Tourism Planning & Development*, 16:3, 256-280.

Pourmohammadi, E. (2014). "Oman has tourism challenges to tackle". Times of Oman. See <http://www.timesofoman.com/news/37615/Article-Oman-has-tourism-challengesto-tackle>.

Pratt, B., (2019). 'Constructing citizen engagement in health research priority-setting to attend to dynamics of power and difference'. *Developing world bioethics*, 19(1), pp.45-60.

Pretty, J.(1995). 'The many interpretations of participation', *Focus*, 16(4), pp.4-5.

Proença, T., Proença, J.F. and Costa, C. (2018). 'Enabling factors for developing a social services network'. *The Service Industries Journal*, 38(5-6), pp.321-342.

Oukil, A., Channouf, N. and Al-Zaidi, A. (2016). 'Performance evaluation of the hotel industry in an emerging tourism destination: The case of Oman'. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 29, pp.60-68

Reid, D.G., Mair, H. and George, W., (2004). 'Community tourism planning: A self-assessment instrument'. *Annals of Tourism research*, 31(3), pp.623-639.

Richard, D.M. (2002). 'Collaborative planning: Building consensus and building a distinct model for practice', *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 21(3), pp. 237-253.

Richardson, V. (1994). 'Conducting research on practice'. *Educational Researcher*, 23(5), 5-10.

Risso, W.A., Barquet, A. and Brida, J.G. (2010). 'Causality between economic growth and tourism expansion: Empirical evidence from Trentino-Alto Adige', *Journal of Tourism*, 5(2), pp. 87-98.

Robinson, P., Heitmann, S., Dieke, P.U.C. (2011). "*Research Themes for Tourism*". Wallingford: CABI.

Robson, C. (2011). "*Real World Research: A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner-Researchers*". 3rd edn., Oxford: Blackwell.

Saarinen, J., Rogerson, C.M. and Hall, C.M. (2017). 'Geographies of tourism development and planning' *Tourism Geographies*, 19 (3), 307-317.

- Saftic, D.A.T. and Luk, N. (2011). 'Stakeholder approach in tourism management: Implication for Croatian tourism'. *30th International Conference on Organizational Science Development* Portorož, Slovenia. March 23rd – 25th 2011.
- Saito, H. and Ruhanen, L., (2017). 'Power in tourism stakeholder collaborations: Power types and power holders'. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 31, pp.189-196.
- Sakitri, G. (2018). "Local community engagement in a festival in Indonesia", *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*, Vol. 12 No. 1, pp. 29-46.
- Saltelli, A. and Giampietro, M., (2017). 'What is wrong with evidence-based policy, and how can it be improved?' *Futures*, 91, pp.62-71.
- Saufi, A., O'Brien, D. and Wilkins, H. (2014). 'Inhibitors to host community participation in sustainable tourism development in developing countries'. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 22(5), pp.801-820.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. (2007). "*Research Methods for Business Students*". 4 th edition. London, Prentice Hall.
- Sautter, E.T. and Leisen, B. (1999). 'Managing stakeholders: A tourism planning model', *Annals of Tourism Research*, 26(2), pp. 312-328.
- Schilling-Vacaflor, A., (2014). 'Rethinking the link between consultation and conflict: lessons from Bolivia's gas sector'. *Canadian Journal of Development Studies/Revue Canadienne d'études du développement*. 35(4), pp.503-521.
- Scholz, F. (2018). 'Oman—a model of democratic development in the Arabo-Islamic world?', *Arab World Geographer*, 21(1), pp. 83-92.
- SCP (2016). "*A Special Edition on the Economic Diversification Sectors for the 9th Five-Year Development Plan*". The Supreme Council of Planning, Oman: (Accessed: 17/4/2019).
- Serra, E. and Tentarelli, L. (2016). 'On the lack of bound states for certain NLS equations on metric graphs'. *Nonlinear Analysis: Theory, Methods & Applications*, 145, pp.68-82.
- Sharpley, R. (2002). 'The challenges of economic diversification through tourism: the case of Abu Dhabi', *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 4(3), pp. 221-235.
- Silverman, D. (2011). "*Interpreting Qualitative Data: A Guide to the Principles of Qualitative Research*". 4th edn. London: Sage.
- Skelcher, C., Mathur, N. and Smith, M., (2005). 'The public governance of collaborative spaces: Discourse, design and democracy'. *Public administration*, 83(3), pp.573-596.
- Stewart, D.W. (2015). '*Focus groups : theory and practice*', in Shamdasani, P.N. (ed.) Los Angeles: Sage.

Strassheim, H. and Kettunen, P., (2014). 'When does evidence-based policy turn into policy-based evidence? Configurations, contexts and mechanisms'. *Evidence & Policy: A Journal of Research, Debate and Practice*, 10(2), pp.259-277.

Subedi, D. (2016). 'Explanatory sequential mixed method design as the third research community of knowledge claim', *Am J Educ Res*, 4(7), pp. 570-577.

Swarbrooke, J. (2010). "*Sustainable tourism management*". (4th ed.). Rawat Publications

TANFEED (2017). "*The National Programme for Enhancing The Economic Diversification*". Muscat: TANFEED. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.tanfeedh.gov.om/handbook.php> (Accessed: 18.8.2017).

Telfer, D. J., & Sharpley, R. (2008). "*Tourism and Development in the Developing World*". New York: Routledge.

Tennøy, A., Hansson, L., Lissandrello, E. and Næss, P., (2016). 'How planners' use and non-use of expert knowledge affect the goal achievement potential of plans: Experiences from strategic land-use and transport planning processes in three Scandinavian cities'. *Progress in Planning*, 109, pp.1-32.

Teo, P. (2002). 'Striking a balance for sustainable tourism: implications of the discourse on globalisation'. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 10(6), 459-474.

Terry, G., Hayfield, N. and Clarke, V. (2017). "*Thematic Analysis Chapter, in The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research in Psychology*". Ed: Willigs and Rogers, Sage Publications.

Tewdwr-Jones, M. & Allmendinger, P., (1998). 'Deconstructing Communicative Rationality A Critique of Habermasian collaborative planning'. *Environment and Planning A*, 30(11), pp.1975–1989.

THR (2016). "*Oman Tourism Strategy 2040*". Muscat: Ministry of Tourism (Accessed: 23.01.2018).

Timothy, D.J. (1998). 'Cooperative tourism planning in a developing destination', *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 6(1), pp. 52-68.

Timothy, D.J. (1999). 'Participatory planning A view of tourism in Indonesia'. *Annals of tourism research*, 26(2), pp.371-391.

Timothy, D.J., Tosun, C., Singh, S., and Dowling, R.K. (2003). "*Tourism in Destination Communities*". Wallingford: CBA publishing.

Tonkiss, F., (2012). 'Discourse analysis'. *Researching society and culture*, 3, pp.405-423.

Tonea, M and OgârlacI Elena, (2012). "*Durable Development of Tourism and its Impact on the Environment*". Tibiscus University in Timisoara, Faculty of Economics, pp. 156-160.

Tosun, C. (1999). 'Towards a typology of community participation in the tourism development process', *Anatolia*, 10(2), pp. 113-134.

- Tosun, C. (2000). 'Limits to community participation in the tourism development process in developing countries', *Tourism Management*, 21(6), pp. 613-633.
- Tosun, C. (2005). 'Stages in the emergence of a participatory tourism development approach in the developing world', *Geoforum*, 36(3), pp. 333-352.
- Tosun, C. and Timothy, D.J. (2001). 'Shortcomings in planning approaches to tourism development in developing countries: The case of Turkey.', *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 13(7), pp. pp. 352-359. .
- Tuulentie, S. and Mettiäinen, I. (2007). 'Local participation in the evolution of ski resorts: the case of Ylläs and Levi in Finnish Lapland', *Forest, Snow and Landscape Research*, 81(1) p. 2.
- Uzar, F. (2007). 'Social participation of Turkish and Arabic immigrants in the neighbourhood: Case study of Moabit West, Berlin'. *Journal of Identity and Migration Studies*, 1(2), 44-66.
- Van Dijk TA., (1985). "*Handbook of discourse analysis*". London: Academic Press.
- Van Dijk, T.A. (1993). 'Principles of critical discourse analysis'. *Discourse & society*, 4(2), pp.249-283.
- Van Dijk, T. (2001). "*Critical Discourse Analysis*". in Tannen, D., Schiffrin, D., & Hamilton, D. (Eds.), *Handbook of discourse analysis* (pp. 352-371). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Van Dijk TA., (2006). '*Discourse and manipulation*'. *Discourse & Society*. 17(3):359-83.
- Van Damme, J.A.N. and Brans, M., (2012). 'Managing public consultation: a conceptual framework and empirical findings from Belgian case studies'. *Public Administration*, 90(4), pp.1047-1066.
- Van Nguyen, H., Diane, L. and Newsome, D. (2020). 'Kinh and ethnic tourism stakeholder participation and collaboration in tourism planning in Sapa, Vietnam'. *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*. 14 (4). pp. 579-597.
- Var, T. and Gunn, C. (2020). "*Tourism planning: Basics, concepts, cases*". Routledge.
- Veal, A. J. (2002). "*Leisure and tourism policy and planning*" (2nd ed.). New York: CABI Pub.
- Veal, A.J., (2017). "*Research methods for leisure and tourism*". Pearson UK.
- Vukotić, S. and Vojnović, B., (2016). 'The role and importance of strategic plans in the development of tourism'. In *TISC-Tourism International Scientific Conference Vrnjačka Banja* (Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 118-134). June.
- Waligo, V.M., Clarke, J. and Hawkins, R. (2015). 'Embedding stakeholders in sustainable tourism strategies', *Annals of Tourism resaerch*, 55, pp. 90-93.

Waligo, V.M., Clarke, J. and Hawkins, R. (2013). 'Implementing sustainable tourism: A multi-stakeholder involvement management framework', *Tourism Management*, 36(C), pp. 342-353.

Wang, H., Yang, Z., Chen, L., Yang, J. and Li, R. (2010). 'Minority community participation in tourism: A case of Kanas Tuva villages in Xinjiang, China'. *Tourism Management*, 31(6), pp.759-764.

Wang, J., Liu-Lastres, B., Shi, Y. and Li, T. (2019). 'Thirty years of research on tourism safety and security: A comparative automated content analysis approach', *Journal of China Tourism Research*, 15(3), pp. 340-358.

Wanner, A. and Pröbstl-Haider, U. (2019). 'Barriers to stakeholder involvement in sustainable rural tourism development-experiences from southeast Europe', *Sustainability*, 11(12), p. 3372.

Warner, M. (1997). 'Consensus' participation: an example for protected areas planning. *Public Administration and Development: The International Journal of Management Research and Practice*, 17(4), pp.413-432.

Watkins, D. and Gioia, D. (2015). "*Mixed Methods Research*". USA: Oxford University Press.

Webler, T. and Tuler, S. (2021). 'Four decades of public participation in risk decision making'. *Risk Analysis*, 41(3), pp.503-518.

Westcott, M. (ed.) (2018). "*Introduction to Tourism and Hospitality in BC*. [Computer programme]". British Columbia. Capilano University.

Whittemore, R., Chase, S.K. and Mandle, C.L., (2001). 'Validity in qualitative research'. *Qualitative health research*, 11(4), pp.522-537.

Widdowson, H. (1995). 'Discourse analysis: a critical view'. *Language and Literature*, 4(3), 157-172.

Williams, S. (2009). "*Tourism Geography: A New Synthesis*". 2nd edn. London: Routledge.

Winckler, O. (2007). 'The birth of Oman's tourism industry', *Tourism*, 55(2), pp. 221-234.

Wodak, R. and Meyer, M., (2009). 'Critical discourse analysis: History, agenda, theory and methodology'. *Methods of critical discourse analysis*, 2, pp.1-33.

Wood, L.A. and Kroger, R.O. (2000). "*Doing Discourse Analysis: Methods for Studying Action in Talk and Text*". Sage Publication. Online copy.

Wondirad, A., Tolkach, D. and King, B. (2020). 'NGOs in ecotourism: patrons of sustainability or neo-colonial agents? Evidence from Africa'. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 45(2), pp.144-160.

Woo, E., Uysal, M. and Sirgy, M.J. (2018). 'Tourism impact and stakeholders' quality of life', *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 42(2), pp. 260-286.

World Commission for Environment and Development (WCED), (1987). "*Our Common Future: the Brundtland Report*", Oxford: Oxford University Press.

WTTC (2017) *Travel & Tourism Economic Impact 2017, Oman*. World Travel and Tourism Council. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.wttc.org/-/media/files/reports/economic-impact-research/countries-2017/oman2017.pdf> (Accessed: 14.2.2018).

WTTC (2019). "*Travel and Tourism Economic Impact 2019 World*". World Travel and Tourism Council. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.wttc.org/-/media/files/reports/economic-impact-research/regions-2019/world2019.pdf> (Accessed: 14.10.2019).

Yanes, A., Zielinski, S., Diaz Cano, M. and Kim, S.I., (2019). 'Community-based tourism in developing countries: A framework for policy evaluation'. *Sustainability*, 11(9), p.2506.

Ying, T., Jiang, J. and Zhou, Y., (2015). 'Networks, citizenship behaviours and destination effectiveness: A comparative study of two Chinese rural tourism destinations'. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 23(8-9), pp.1318-1340.

Young, J.C., Jordan, A., Searle, K.R., Butler, A., Chapman, D.S., Simmons, P. and Watt, A.D., (2013). 'Does stakeholder involvement really benefit biodiversity conservation?'. *Biological Conservation*, 158, pp.359-370.

Zawilińska, B. and Szpara, K. (2016). 'Participative model of tourism development planning in a region of high natural value: A case study of the Polish Carpathians'. *Scientific Review of Physical Culture*, 6(4), pp.242-253.

Appendices

A. Interview transcript

Ahmed: First thing I would like to ask you about is that what does the term tourism planning mean for the Ministry of Environment?

KI-M22: Look, we specialise in the natural conservation. How do we develop these reserves for tourism? We care about natural conservation. When we select conservation areas, we must have few important points in mind. One of them is to preserve the natural components of the location. We do want to preserve for the society and for the visitors who visits Oman. On the other hand, we have to promote it for tourism bearing in mind that no damage is made to either to the visitors nor to the conservation areas. Currently we have a project in TANFEED programme, we tried to make a partnership with the Ministry of Tourism and there is an acceptance of this partnership from their side. For us in Oman we had a project in the year 2009, that is the scientific centre in Ras Alhad which is the turtle conservation area. It is located in the South East Governorate. We built a small centre which has many facilities, so that when the tourist comes, he knows the importance of the reserve and the area in general, such as the local culture, and the handicrafts available locally. When you enter the location, you find that there is a tourism aim and there is an environmental aim complementing each other. In the centre there are rooms for relaxation (e.g., viewing the sea) but they are environmentally friendly. When we built them, we thought of the lighting, these rooms have low lighting so that the lights do not harms the turtles. Also, when a tourist enters the centre he is asked to visit the museum, so that he knows the history of the area, the turtles and the relation between the turtles and the local people throughout the history. We are now also working on another project that is Alsaleel farm in the same Governorate. This reservation has gazelles, some local trees called Sumar, wild animals, foxes, and mountains routes. We want to have safaris in this area and promote it for tourism.

Ahmed: Did you [the MoE] choose these areas or did the Ministry of Tourism had chosen them?

KI-M22: We choose them, we have about 18 conservation areas identified, and 163 other proposed conservations[identified]. Among them will be Jabal Akhadar for eco-tourism. People visit the Jabal, but you need a centre that called visitors centre, which shows the

importance of the centre. You also want the local products available in the market not to be offered in the public market, but it should be in a niche private market. Now we do have coordination with the Public Authority for crafts Industries, Ministry of Heritage, and MoT, to come up with ideas that promote tourism. However, our main goal is environment, and the environment comes first for us, but if you take care of the environment without promoting it, it is as if you have not done anything. It is as if you have preserved in a closed place, but when you preserve and promote you can create awareness.

Ahmed: So, what do you aim from promoting the eco-tourism?

KI-M22: awareness and diversification of income, producing jobs for locals.

Ahmed: I would like to ask you about how you see the tourism planning system in Oman from your point of view as the Ministry of Environment?

KI-M22: It is still a new system; we cannot evaluate it, and to be honest now the Supreme Council of Planning is trying to take care of this along with the other governmental organisations.

Ahmed: Is the Ministry of Environment involved in making the plans for tourism?

KI-M22: Yes, of course, because any tourism project must be environmentally assessed by us.

Ahmed: When do they involve you? Before implementation or after implementation? For example, there was a master plan to develop Musandam Governorate. Where you involved when they made such plans, or did they involve you later when they wanted to develop the projects?

KI-M22: They must get our approval first.

Ahmed: Do you have any idea if there are regulations that organises participation?

KI-M22: No, we do not have.

Ahmed: Have you participated before in making plans or master plans for tourism?

KI-M22: No, we did not participate. Currently we are working with executive regulations that organise tourism activities.

Ahmed: So, do you work in making legislations with the Ministry of Tourism?

KI-M22: Yes, with the Ministry of Tourism, specifically with the Department of Tourism Investments.

Ahmed: So, are you participating in making laws or in planning?

KI-M22: No, we did not participate in planning.

Ahmed: Why have you not participated, why do you think?

KI-M22: Maybe because we are new to this field.

Ahmed: What do you mean?

KI-M22: We do have the experience and the expertise, but it could be that the view of involving the tourism with the environment was not clear. However, the officials' direction now is to invest in the environment for tourism without harming the environment.

Ahmed: From your point of view; do we face challenges in planning for tourism?

KI-M22: Of course; I will not talk about the role of the Ministry of Tourism, they are playing a great role and they must be thanked for, but the society could be a challenge.

Ahmed: What are the challenges that you see coming from the society?

KI-M22: For example, in Bidya they get thousands of tourists annually, are there any facilities for tourism? I am asking you, tell me?

Ahmed: Yes, there are some hotels, resorts, camps.

KI-M22: Who do they belong to?

Ahmed: To investors.

KI-M22: Where is the role of the Ministry of Tourism?

Ahmed: I would like to hear your views.

KI-M22: I think that the Ministry of Tourism is doing a good job, but we need to be more organised. Now they are working on organising Bidya, but unfortunately the challenges come

from the visitors themselves, visitors harm the environment by throwing rubbish and make noise for locals and animals. If you visit Wadi Shaab and Wadi bani Khalid, you will find a lot of rubbish thrown by visitors. Even though the Ministry of Tourism have put sign boards, still [the instructions are] not followed.

Ahmed: So, do you see these as damages.

KI-M22: Yes, these are damages.

Ahmed: How do you deal with these damages?

KI-M22: This is not the role of the Ministry of Environment, these are individual behaviors. The individual himself should take care of this. The Ministry of Municipalities' role comes here.

Ahmed: Are there any laws or fines against these practices?

KI-M22: I think they have in the Police.

Ahmed: The one in the police is traffic fines not environmental fines and that it is only if for anything to do with driving.

KI-M22: We do not have fines in our Ministry for throwing garbage, the Municipalities should have.

Ahmed: Does the municipalities have these laws?

KI-M22: I do not know, you can ask about it. But for us we have fines for; throwing liquids and building materials in the wadis. The ones who drive [vehicles] on the plants and grass, we do have fines and we do fine people when they do this.

Ahmed: Are there any other damages coming from tourism?

KI-M22: Yes, the foreign tourists sometimes take some items from the environment which are not supposed to be taken. The tourist must come to see and to not take things with them.

Ahmed: Whose role is it to deal with such cases?

KI-M22: It should be the airports; they are doing their job.

Ahmed: What benefits do you expect from tourism?

KI-M22: As I told you, if we take care of tourism then we might not need any other source of income. Look at Malaysia, Turkey and many other countries. If we utilise these resources sustainably and plan well, we will not need any other source of income. If we look at the map of Oman it has all the environments throughout the year. In the winter you have the north with vales, deserts, sand dunes and mountains; in the summer we have the monsoon Khareef season in Salalah. We have so many places, but we need proper planning to reach the aim. We will have jobs for the local people.

Ahmed: So, what do we lack?

KI-M22: Promotion, but do not promote before you prepare.

Ahmed: Excellent, can you give us some examples?

KI-M22: We have Aldaymanyat Islands which consists of 9 islands. We need to promote it but first, we must have a proper plan to manage the visitors.

Ahmed: Do you have a real example where there was a promotion for a site but there was no management for the site, or the Ministry of Environment was not there?

KI-M22: No, I don't think there was because we are still new to the eco-tourism and we still do not have the required experience. The Ministry of Tourism has the required experience.

Ahmed: Do the employees in the Ministry of Tourism have the right awareness about environment that you opt for as a Ministry of Environment?

KI-M22: Not everybody. The investors when they come, they aim for money only and they do not care about the environment, but this is not correct because if they do not care about the environment the site will be damaged in 5 years and will be lost as a source of income.

Ahmed: Who should participate in tourism planning?

KI-M22: The Ministry of Tourism, The Supreme Council of Planning, the Ministry of Environment, The Municipalities, the Ministry of Heritage, the locals, and the private sector.

Ahmed: How about the local people, how should they be involved?

KI-M22; Through the community leaders; it easier to get their acceptance and support for the developments.

Ahmed: Do you think if we involve all of these stakeholders then the tourism planning system will improve?

KI-M22: For sure.

Ahmed: Will this not slow down the decision-making?

KI-M22: If you make a committee from all these stakeholders and they make the decisions instantly, then this would be the correct way to do it. You cannot work isolated from other organisations, you need all of them.

Ahmed: Who should lead tourism planning in Oman? Which organisation?

KI-M22: The Ministry of Tourism.

Ahmed: When we open the tourism sector in Oman, one can expect impacts (whether positive or negative). Will these impacts be just in Oman or it will be beyond Oman, for example if we have pollution in the sea will it reach other countries, or if there are economic and social benefits will these also be beyond Oman?

KI-M22: I cannot say because we have limited experience in tourism. Many Omanis go to Dubai to discover, and many tourists comes to Oman to visit Hawyat Njam site, and Aldaymanyat Island. We have many visitors in our conservation areas-we have hundreds of visitors- without having eco-tourism. If we have a complete project for the eco-tourism the numbers will increase and there will be income and jobs for the locals. For example, the traditional Omani food, many people may not know it, we can promote it, and if we have eco- tourism, I can promote it in the islands, but not to serve the food in the islands.

Ahmed: Talking about the benefits of tourism, who is most benefiting from tourism?

KI-M22: The citizens.

Ahmed: Who is less benefited, which stakeholder?

KI-M22: All will benefit, we cannot say someone will benefit less because you do not have a way to measure it.

Ahmed: How do you think the Omani Government ranks economic, social and environmental considerations when deciding about developing a new sector like tourism?

KI-M22: They are focusing on the things that benefit the citizens, whether it is environment or economic. His Majesty is the first environmental person in Oman before neighbouring countries. The {negative} impact on environment will not be from the government. All of these three elements [economic, social and environment] should be equally treated.

Ahmed: Do you want to participate in tourism planning?

KI-M22: For sure; myself personally I am taking care of the issue.

Ahmed: Why do you think that you should participate in tourism planning?

KI-M22: Because if we do not promote the conservations for tourism then they are useless, we must promote.

Ahmed: Would conservation measures bring their own income to help you maintain it sustainably?

KI-M22: Yes, for sure, this is a basic requirement for us.

Ahmed: At what stage of planning should you participate?

KI-M22: At the beginning when they start, and we must be there until the end.

Ahmed: Do you have concerns about introducing tourism in Oman?

KI-M22: My concern is the impact on the environment. But for us any projects that comes must have an environmental study.

Ahmed: Who does these studies?

KI-M22: The companies themselves.

Ahmed: Do you have any criteria that they must cover in their studies?

KI-M22: Yes, there is.

Ahmed: Do you then assess their studies?

KI-M22: Yes, we do look at the studies.

Ahmed: Will not the companies wants to show that there are no environmental damages to you?

KI-M22: We study them and see the impacts. The studies are not done at one season, it must be done through one complete year, because sometimes animals move during the different seasons.

Ahmed: So, will this not delay the tourism projects?

KI-M22: No this will not delay, because the investor should know this, and I do not want the foreign investor to run projects inside the conservation areas, the companies must be selected carefully where the main aim of the company should not be to make profit.

Ahmed: But companies aim at making profit?

KI-M22: But companies must try to balance and give more weight to the nature.

Ahmed: Do you have any relation with the coastal tourism?

KI-M22: We have a department responsible for assessing the sea activities, you can meet with them.

Ahmed: What are the activities that are practiced in coastal tourism?

KI-M22: When you meet with them, they will tell you.

Ahmed: Do you think that there is any conflict between tourists and the users of the sites, for example the conservations?

KI-M22: We have not seen this.

Ahmed: How about between fishermen and tourist?

KI-M22: There are individual behaviours only, but we can sort it out.

Ahmed: How?

KI-M22: The citizens should be with the tourists and not against them, when they fish the tourists will buy the fish.

Ahmed: Are there any real stories that happened?

KI-M22: No.

Ahmed: Are there any zones for fishing and for other activities?

KI-M22: There is but still you find people breaching the law.

Ahmed: Where should the tourism projects be concentrated?

KI-M22: Everywhere in Oman, each area in Oman has something unique; look at all the regions, wherever there is an attraction there should be projects. For example, Alqasfa Spring, it is not developed and promoted but there are thousands of people visiting it. They should make a wall, build bathrooms, restaurants and other facilities. The local people will run the restaurants, bathrooms, and the rooms.

Ahmed: Would you recommend tourism as a livelihood to your children or to a young person asking your advice about future jobs? Why?

KI-M22: For sure, because it is a promising sector and I advise people to have tourism companies and promote Oman. I love the desert, but the tours are now operated by expatriates, where are the local Omani people? Why aren't they working in the sector?

Ahmed: Is there anything that you would like to add?

KI-M22: No thank you, I hope that I have been able to answer your questions and wish you a good luck.

Ahmed: What are your current roles and responsibilities related to tourism?

KI-M22: We work on developing conservations for eco-tourism.

Ahmed: Gender?

KI-M22: Male

Ahmed: What is your Age group?

KI-M22: 26-45

Ahmed: What are your educational qualifications?

KI-M22: Bachelor's degree

Ahmed: What is your position level in your organization?

KI-M22: Middle Management

Ahmed: How many years of experience have you had in this position?

KI-M22: 5 years in this position and total 17 years of experience

Ahmed: Location of your organization?

KI-M22: Muscat

B. Information Letter and Consent Form for Invitation to be interviewed

Date:

Dear,

This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study I am conducting as part of my Doctoral degree in Tourism Planning in Newcastle University under the supervision of Professor Selina Stead and Professor Tim Gray. I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you decided to take part.

There are many demands to improve the tourism sector performance in Oman. This study covers one of the most important phases in tourism development. This study will focus on stakeholder participation in tourism planning in Oman. It will attempt to identify the challenges in stakeholder participation in tourism planning and will attempt to suggest a model for participation.

You are an important person and you have been selected for this study because of the knowledge and or expectance or roles you have played, or you can play in the future of tourism planning in Oman. It is important to understand how the tourism sector functions with so many organizations, and communities that have stake in tourism such as the one with which you are currently involved. Therefore, I would like to include your organization as one of several organizations to be involved in my study. I believe that because you are actively involved in the management and operation of your organization, you are best suited to speak to the various issues, related to tourism planning.

Participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve an interview of approximately 60 minutes in length to take place in a mutually agreed upon location. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences by advising the researcher. With your permission, the interview will be tape-recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the interview has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points that you wish. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this

study, however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used. Data collected during this study will be used for researchers' purposes and journal and scientific publications. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at my mobile number 92664545 or by e-mail at .

You can also contact my supervisor by email Professor. Selina Stead selina.stead@newcastle.ac.uk and Professor. Tim Gray tim.gray@newcastle.ac.uk). I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics committee at Newcastle University. I hope that the results of my study will be of benefit to future of tourism planning in Oman. I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Sincerely,

(Signature)

Ahmed Sulaiman Khalfan AL Mahrizi

PhD student

Newcastle University

C. Consent form

I have read the information presented in the information letter about the PhD research study on stakeholders' participation in Tourism Planning in Oman being conducted by Ahmed Sulaiman Khalfan AL Mahrizi from Newcastle University. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be tape recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses. I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in the dissertation and/or publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous.

I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

This project had been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Research Ethics Review Committee at Newcastle University. With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

___ **YES** ___ **NO**

I agree to have my interview tape recorded.

YES **NO**

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.

YES **NO**

Participant's Name (please print) _____

Participant's Signature _____ **Date**

Researcher's Signature _____ **Date**

Researcher's Title _____ **Department**

D. Generation of Initial Discourse Strands of the KI Interviews

Total number of main discourses strands/ topics is 22 and the total number of discourse strands/ subtopics is 44.

First textual examination of discourse strands

Sl No	Discourse strand	Sub strands	Description/comments
1	Career and Jobs		This node includes all statements related to jobs, careers, and opportunities that the tourism sector provides.
2	Conflict	None	This node includes all statements about conflicts or disagreement as a result of tourism development or activities
3	Coastal and marine tourism	This node includes all statements on coastal activities which were repeatedly brought up participants, presenting both negative and positive views about such activities.	
		Coastal stakeholders	Stakeholders that were mentioned and their roles in coastal tourism
		Coastal zonings	Coastal zoning was repeatedly raised by participants in relation to coastal tourism development.
		Cruise ships	Impact of Cruise ships impact on the tourism sector.
4	CSR	None	This nod includes all statements on CSR activities by tourism companies
5	Tourism development, projects, and sites	This node includes all statements related to tourism project development, issues with projects, regional developments & sites.	
		Land use	Statements regarding land use/allocation in Oman.
		National strategy for landscaping development	Statements regarding a new strategy that is currently under development. This was raised in very few interviews; the strategy will affect land use criterion
6	Economic Impacts of Tourism	None	This node includes all statements on how the tourism sector impacts the economy, GDP, economic growth
7	Education and awareness	None	This node includes all participants statements on tourism awareness and tourism education.
8	Environment	This node includes all statements on the importance of the Environment was repeatedly emphasised by participants.	

		Eco-tourism	Conservation development for tourism purposes.
		Negative Tourism impact on environment	All vies and examples of how tourism impacts the environment negatively
9	Experts	None	This node includes all statements regarding the role of consultants & experts in tourism planning and development.
10	Oil & Gas sector	None	This node includes all statements regarding reliance on oil & gas and impact of oil prices on tourism development.
11	Government coordination & communication	This node includes all different Government bodies identified by participants and the need for coordination and communication between them	
		Government E-services	Views regarding government E-services
		Licencing	This nod includes all the views related to the licencing process in Oman and the impact on tourism sector
		Means of communication	Mechanisms for interaction between stakeholders in the planning process
12	Impact of tourism (non-economic impacts)	This node includes all statements, negative and positive on tourism impacts or any concerns over future impacts.	
		Benefits of tourism	Benefits that people though would come out of tourism
		Cultural impact	Views on the possible impact of tourism on the local cultural
		Damages from tourism	Potential damages from tourism apart from cultural ones
		Security	Views on national security and its relation to tourism planning and development
		Archaeological and cultural artefacts	Statements on losses and theft of Archaeological and cultural artefacts from the country
13	Infrastructure	None	This node includes all statements regarding infrastructure requirements & developments in relation to tourism or attracting investments
14	Investment	None	This node includes all statements regarding investors, funds and investment potential including, regional investments, and foreign investment
15	Legislations and laws	None	This node includes statements regarding all legal issues including

			existing laws or legislation that may be lacking
16	Local community	None	This node includes all views or statements about impact of tourism on local communities and local community roles in tourism planning & development
17	Tourism Markets & marketing	This node includes all discourse related to marketing	
		Branding	Oman tourism brand
		Comparison to other countries	Brings together all comparisons with other destinations
		Growth	Current and potential tourism growth in Oman
		Oman's natural attractions	What Oman's tourism attractions can Oman offer.
		Prices	Pricing of tourism products in Oman.
		Products and services	Current and potential tourism products and services in the tourism sector in Oman
		Promotions	Participants views on promotion strategies for the Omani tourism sector
		Segments	Niche and mass market and the views on right target
		Targeted market and potential market	Statements on current countries where tourists come from and where is the need to explore new countries
	Visas	Tourism and visas both for tourist and labours	
18	Participants Profile	None	This node includes all the personal details of participants
19	Tourism Planning System	This node includes all views on the planning system in Oman	
		Government Officials performance & accountability	Views on performance and ability of government employees
		Challenges	Views on general challenges of tourism planning
		Decision making	Views related to the decision-making process in Oman
		Foreign experts planning	Views about involvement of international experts in tourism planning in Oman
		OTS 2040	Participants views on Oman Tourism Strategy 2040
		Planning phases	All statement in planning phases that participants wanted to be involved in and also brings in what was described by some of interviewees on past planning in Oman

		Priorities	Views on how the economic, environmental, and social aspects are prioritised in Oman.
		Responsibility of planning	Views on which organisations should be responsible for tourism planning, how responsibilities are or should be allocated between government organisation and authority for tourism planning in Oman.
		Current SP situation in Oman	Types of SP is currently practiced in Oman.
		Planning and decision-making	How SP can influence decision making.
		Involvement of stakeholders	What has been expressed in relation to involving different stakeholders in tourism planning
		Experiences of participation	Participants experience with SP in Oman.
		Type of Stakeholders	Different tourism stakeholders identified by participants
		Willingness to participate	Participants views on whether they want to participate in tourism planning or not.
20	TANFEED	None	This node includes all statements about TANFEED
21	Private sector	None	This node includes all issues related to the private sector.
22	Privatisation	None	This node includes all views related to privatisation of some tourism attractions sites and government services
23	Sector Management	This node includes all statements regarding general problems on management of the tourism sector and challenges	
		Resources	Views on the available budget, resources
		Skills	Views on the available experience and qualified people in the tourism sector in general and at the MoT level in particular.

E. Final Discourse Strands

Sl. No.	Discourse Strand
1	Benefits of Tourism
	a. Economic Growth and Employment Opportunities
	b. Benefits to Stakeholders
	c. Non-Economic Benefits
2	Risks of Tourism
	a. Environmental Concerns
	b. Impact on the Local Culture
	c. The Chosen Tourism Strategy
	d. Security Concerns
3	Current Tourism Planning in Oman
	a. Direction of tourism
	b. Government Expertise
	c. Decision-making
	d. Implementation of Decisions and Tourism Projects
	e. Funding for Tourism Projects
4	Current Stakeholder Participation in Tourism Planning
	a. Selection of Stakeholders
	b. Stakeholder Power
	c. Stakeholder Participation and Decision-making
5	Stakeholder Participation in OTS 2040
6	Extent of Stakeholder Participation
7	Stakeholder Motives for Participation
8	Key Stakeholders in Tourism Planning
9	Stakeholder Consultation and Stakeholder Decision-making

G. FGD Discourse Strands

Sl. No.	Discourse strand	Description
1	Process I	Views of the participants on Process I.
2	Top-Down Hierarchy	Participants' views on top-down planning systems.
3	Stakeholder Inclusiveness	Views on the inclusion of stakeholders in the two frameworks.
4	The Central Role of Consultants in Planning	Views about the roles of the consultants in both framework
5	Length of the Planning Process	How participants view the planning process and the speed of decision-making in the two process frameworks.
6	Legislation and Decision-Making Power	Views on the decision-making authority for tourism planning