

Chapter 18

Tourism Policy in Bangladesh: A Critical Perspective



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Abstract The tourism industry of Bangladesh is reported to be one of the fastest-growing in South Asia. In the last few decades, the country witnessed a sharp growth of a social class with discretionary income to afford leisure travels. However, this is dubious that the existing tourism policy is inclusive, and has been able to facilitate a sustainable development trajectory of the tourism industry. This study comprehensively reviews the tourism policy implications and addresses complexities at the intersections of the public, private, and community sectors in Bangladesh. The findings suggest that an inclusive tourism policy and relevant instruments are essential to support and (de)regulate the thriving tourism industry of the country. This chapter further identifies the tourism product and service demands of the emerging social class and required policy interventions to promote and manage tourism in the popular destinations.

Keywords Tourism · Policy · Policy implications · Tourism development · Bangladesh

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Introduction

Tourism policy is a comprehensive plan that includes a definite goal and procedures to achieve that goal. In principle, policy is presented in conventional statements as a set of laws and official statements. Tourism policy and relevant interventions arguably have major impacts on the development of regional and local tourism regimes (Connley 2007; Sheppard and Fennell 2019). However, tourism policy is typically regarded as an integral part of the overall national economic policy of a country (Deng et al. 2019). Indeed, this chapter echoes, “Tourism policy is often entangled with, or subordinate to, other policies, which may well hinder policy intervention in development and weaken the representation of the stakeholders in such places” (Cheong and Miller 2000: p. 373). Tourism policy (re)formulation and transition need to be dynamic, integral and interactive to promote national development policy and facilitate sustainable industry growth.

As one of the biggest deltaic islands in the world, Bangladesh possesses a range of existing and potential tourist attractions. These include the Cox’s Bazar- the world’s longest sandy sea beach and the Kuakata- one of the world’s few sea beaches that offer to view both sunrise and sunshine from a single point. The country also has hundreds of rivers, most prominently the Padma, the Meghna and the Jamuna, and the Brahmaputra that offer significant opportunities to develop “riverine tourism“. In addition to the deltaic features (nature-specific), the country has immense potential to develop varieties of tourism based on explicit resources such as forests, hills, rural lifestyles and landscapes, cultural activities, archaeological and heritage sites, religious monuments and places, business activities, and so on (Hossain and Wadud 2020; Hoque et al. 2018; Khondker and Ahsan 2015; Rahman et al. 2018). In spite of such a wide-range of resources to develop diversified tourisms, the country largely fails to utilize the blessings, which is reflected by the poor travel and tourism related statistics. The global direct contribution of travel and tourism to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2018 was 10.4% while that of Bangladesh was merely 2.2%, and South Asian contribution was 3.6% (World Travel and Tourism Council 2018). In reflection to this statistics, Bangladesh received only 1.026 million tourists in 2017, when the global tourists’ movement reached 1.363 billion (The World Bank 2019). Although it is convincing to some extent from a South Asian viewpoint, tourism in Bangladesh is still at an emerging stage from a global perspective.

This study explores the insights into the contemporary approaches of de- and reconstruction of tourism policy in Bangladesh and informs the policy evaluation, (re)formulation and implementation practices. This chapter also focuses on key actors in a tourism policy network and identifies the indeterminacy inherent in tourism as a form of socio-economic developments in a developing country context and argues for an inclusive and competitive tourism policy initiatives for a sustainable growth trajectory of the individuals, businesses, and communities within.

Tourism Planning and Development in Bangladesh

In general, the authors identified two sources of key policy and planning documents: Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism (MoCAT) and General Economics Division (GED) of Ministry of Planning. The MoCAT developed the National Tourism Policy-2010 whereas GED included key tourism issues within different five-year plans of the country.

The government of Bangladesh adopted first strategic tourism master plan in 1990, which was jointly developed by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Later on in 1992, the government enacted its first National Tourism Policy (NTP). However, the policy was revised as the National Tourism Policy-2010 by the MoCAT (Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism 2010). The revised policy document (written in Bengali language) is divided into six chapters; the first chapter contextualizes the tourism policy while the second chapter outlines 30 specific goals and purposes of the policy in which a “sustainable development” perspective is being highlighted. The third chapter calls for “special recognition or attention” for tourism and hospitality industry and explores potential tourism sectors in Bangladesh. The fourth chapter discusses about the engagement and networks of government agencies involved in the tourism policy formulation and implementation, and tourist destination governance. The fifth chapter is literally an extension and elaboration of previous chapters that summarizes different initiatives for tourism development. The final chapter emphasizes on research, knowledge management and destination for tourism development.

Five-year fiscal plan of Bangladesh acknowledges and accommodates tourism as a contributing sector for the overall socio-economic development of the country. Based on the first ever fiscal plan (FY1973–FY1978), Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC), the then National Tourism Organization (NTO) of the country, prepared a mid-term tourism development plan. The plan set up a framework providing the relevant and essential facilities for capitalizing on natural beauties of the country for attracting more tourists. Subsequently, BPC has been responsible for tourism infrastructure development and marketing (Bangladesh Planning Division n.d.). The seventh fiscal plan (FY2015–FY2020) accommodates tourism as a service sector development tool of the country (General Economics Division 2015). In line with the NTP and the seventh fiscal plan, different government agencies are empowered to lead and manage the tourism planning and development.

Research Approaches

Tourism policy is usually an output being produced, documented, and effected by a government following specific governance procedure, and it falls predominantly within the “public policy” domain (Cairney 2012; Jenkins et al. 2014). It is widely

claimed that tourism policy knowledge is “socially constructed” in which collective efforts of practitioners and other relevant stakeholders create profound impacts along with the researched-context itself (Dredge et al. 2011; Scott 2011). Standing on the “tourism public policy” realm, a “policy evaluative method” was utilized in the construction of this chapter (Dredge et al. 2011). More precisely, policy formulation (problem identification, content, delivery, etc.) and policy implementation (process, outcomes, impacts, etc.) of tourism policy in Bangladesh have been taken into consideration for critical observations and further elaborations. Qualitative content analysis of tourism policy and planning documents available in public domains and qualitative interviews with five industry experts and policy analysts form the empirical basis of this study. This qualitative study employs an interpretive approach to inform the nature and scope of knowledge being sought from the context (Tribe 2008).

Future Directions for Tourism Policy in Bangladesh

The National tourism policy of Bangladesh needs to consider the maximum utilization of resources in a highly competitive global tourism industry. The process of policy planning to develop a tourism sector that is effective in mobilizing resources to optimize benefits to the host government as well as destination (local) communities is challenging. This is particularly a fact for tourism and hospitality industry, which is sensitive to global competitions. Added to this phenomenon, tourism policy of a country rests within the broader paradigm of ‘public policy’ in a country that represents essentially a government’s political agenda, ideology, and views on the sector (Chambers and Airey 2001). Pforr (2005) utilized three analytical lenses to study tourism public policy including a conventional political system, the policy cycle model, and policy network concept. This chapter has widely covered the policy model and network concept in analyzing the tourism public policy of Bangladesh. Figure 18.1 schematically illustrates the broader coverage of critical thought-generation areas and process for this chapter.

Although the above framework has been developed by the authors, the framework is largely informed by the works of: Cairney (2012), Dredge and Jamal (2015), Jenkins et al. (2014), and Scott (2011). The framework has three core areas to focus including policy governance, policy conditions, and policy cycle within a tourism policy context. The following sub-sections discuss each of these areas along with identifying the loopholes in tourism policy of Bangladesh.

Policy Governance

In terms of tourism policy governance, Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism is the apex body while Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC) and Bangladesh Tourism Board (BTB) are associated government agencies to further implanting the policies.

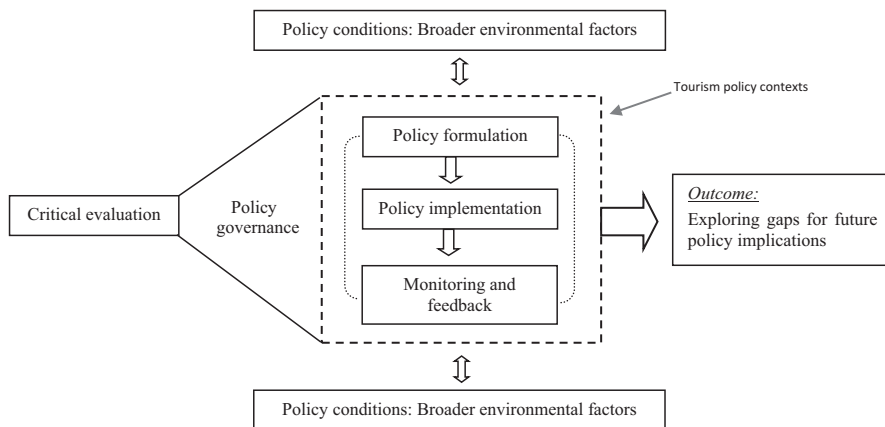


Fig. 18.1 Critical thought-generation areas and process for tourism policy. (After Cairney 2012, Dredge and Jamal 2015, Jenkins et al. 2014, Scott 2011)

Of these two agencies, BPC mostly performs as a business-unit whereas BTB actually represents the National Tourism organization (NTO). As an embodiment of public policy, government or more specially MoCAT carries out the tourism policy in Bangladesh. However, overall policy governance can range from complete government ownership to non-government involvement in the process of operation, promotion, and planning of tourism policies. In between these two extremes, there are a wide variety of mixtures of public-private cooperation. An important policy alternative faced by any country is the choice between centralization of tourism policies with national government or decentralization of policies with local government. Centralization of policies has greater benefit of coordinated planning and implementation, whereas decentralization of policies impacted through utilizing local initiatives, innovations, and diversities.

Chapter 4 of the NTP of Bangladesh has defined five different committees for the governance and realization of tourism policy (Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism 2010); four of which are formed at the central government-level indicating simply the extent of centralization. However, it is also acknowledged that tourism development must be carried out through the involvement of both national and local governments. At this point, observations of industry experts reveal that there are unnecessary layers exist for policy governance which in turn increasing bureaucratic problems such as lengthy decision-making and duplication of resources. Moreover, the experts also urge for a bottom-focus indicating more layers can be increased at the divisional or local levels to site-specific management (committee). Local- or site- level organizations are fundamentally responsible for the successful implementation of tourism policy within a specific locale (destination), but these often lack expertise. Academic and theoretical framework provided by foreign (indicating outsiders) consultancy cannot always be effective as they may be culturally and politically decontextualized and perhaps naive in their assumptions.

Krutwaysho and Bramwell (2010) noted that tourism policy implementation relies on the bargaining powers and relations of actors both from the public and private interest groups. To avoid the unexpected and unfair intervention of central government, in recent times, some tourist generating countries in Europe offered more autonomy to the regions or provinces to develop and implement their own tourism policy. The NTP of Bangladesh can have directives to promote regional tourism policy along with a guidance for integrating the same to the national-level tourism policy and planning instruments. As such, tourism policy has been used for regional integration and cooperation. An implication of this finding indicate acknowledging divisional, regional, or local differences in terms of the respective region's culture as well as landscape.

Within broader policy governance frame, two contemporary issues must be acknowledged and accommodated in future tourism policy development as e-governance and metagovernance (Jenkins et al. 2014). The aspects of e-governance ensure technology-induced communications to citizens that enable free expressions of citizens' will. Jenkins et al. (2014, p. 547) explained that "e-governance includes e-government in addition to the online engagement of stakeholders in shaping, debating, and implementing public policies." This is particularly important for Bangladesh since the current government's vision is positioned as "Digital Bangladesh". Unlike e-governance as a particular way of governance, metagovernance is a blend of different successful governance styles, which is identified as "the governance of governance" (Jessop 2011: p. 106). The concept of "metagovernance" accommodates multi-stakeholder viewpoints in policy and planning instruments at various levels including supranational, national, local, and site (Amore and Hall 2016). The essence of metagovernance is to promote self-organization, thus can be helpful in the realization of regional-level policies as discussed above.

Policy Conditions

Policy conditions simply refer to the broader external environmental factors that influence the contents as well as the implementation of policy (Cairney 2012). Thus, policy conditions are factors outside the tourism policy systems but remain highly influential to the achievement of tourism policy outcomes (Airey and Ruhanen 2014). Such conditions typically include change in exchange rate, consumer protection, demographic structure, environmental damages, changes in laws, size of the political system, and so on. While developing (tourism) policy influences of these factors must be designed so that the likelihood of the achievement of policy outcomes is enhanced. In the development of tourism policy in Bangladesh, these factors are largely sidestepped. For example, the policy document does not consider any provisions for consumer interest protection.

Policy Cycles Within a Tourism Policy Context

As shown in Fig. 18.1, policy cycles briefly cover policy formulation, implementation, and monitoring and feedback. Policy formulation is invariably a challenging task since it identifies the problem issues and decides on the contents. Tourism policy planning is increasingly multiscalar in nature that involves organizations from various levels from supranational to local. It is not always easy to meet demands of relevant organizations and pressure groups and reflecting those (demands) in the policy contents. Policymakers however have to create a balance of international and national concerns.

The formulation of a national-level policy requires distinction in the policy for domestic tourists and international tourists. Since tourism always shares common property resources, which are destination-specific (local), it is an arguable issue whether to allocate scarce and shared (tourism) resources to domestic tourists or international tourists. This in turn is related to the profitability concern where the international tourist segment is usually observed as more profitable thus seeks much attention. However, now a days, domestic tourism has getting popularity among the low and middle-income group with the shift in macroeconomic condition of Bangladesh. Increase in GDP per capita from US\$ 781.15 in 2010 to US\$ 1698.26 in 2018 reflects an upward trend in national income (The World Bank 2020), which enables people to have more disposable income to be spent on tourism activities (Rahman and Shahid 2012). Although domestic tourism does not generate foreign exchange, domestic tourists are almost three times higher than that of international tourists. Domestic tourism can act as tool to increasing integration and sense of belongingness among the countrymen. However, policy makers and planners in Bangladesh seem reluctant to this end to promote the domestic tourism and thereby fail to reap the benefit from it. Tourism policies need to be informed by the need, constraints and challenge face by the domestic tourist while travelling within different destinations of Bangladesh. In this vein, market analysis and perception of market realities can make sense. In the existing tourism policy of Bangladesh, no such focus is evident.

In a developing country like Bangladesh, where domestic tourism comprises the lion's share of tourism features, the magnification of mass tourism is phenomenal. To protect the popular tourists' sites from overcrowding, national tourism policy should be formulated with a guideline indicating appropriate information of the carrying capacity of each destination. A strong research and development department with the capacity of collecting, generating and evaluating the real-life day to day data to calculate the carrying capacity is enormous. Unfortunately, national tourism policy does not have any specific directions to address the problem of mass tourism rather focuses mostly on the prospects and attracting tourists.

Tourism activity has significant impact on the targeted areas especially on the local or destination communities and surrounding environment. Therefore, any policy aimed at developing those areas should identify the negative effects that tourism activities can create and how to lessen the negative impacts, at the same time

enhance the positive traits from those activities. The NTP of Bangladesh has characteristically adopted a sustainable tourism development approach by incorporating and elaborating some clauses that signify integration of tourism development and economic benefits with environmental protection, and involvement of local community. For example, under Chap. 3 of the NTP sub-section 3.2.9 talks about community-based tourism development through an integrated committee that must be formed in representation of both community members and local government members (Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism 2010: p. 4). It is already more than 10 years but the implementation of this clause yet to see a broader application. In contrast, a recent trend is showing an inclination towards the 'enclave tourism' rather than integrated tourism where local community plays a vital role. Enclave tourism refers to tourism development that generally operates within a clearly demarcated, self-contained unit with capital investment from large national and international corporations (Healy and Jamal 2017). Tourist activities and movements are designed to facilitate the tourists with maximum expenditures within the enclave while local community often has no access to the enclave, physically or economically. Ironically enclave tourism becomes more popular in recent times within two important tourist destinations in Bangladesh namely Cox's Bazar and Sylhet.

The negative effects of global climate change are becoming visible and becomes a key topic of discussion across the world. Bangladesh remains one of the worst victims of climate change impacts. Environmental Justice Foundation (2020) claims that in case of 50 cm rise in sea level by 2050, Bangladesh may lose 11% of land area and around 15 million of people, mostly located in the low-lying coastal areas, will be severely impacted and displaced. This is a real concern for tourism and that must be acknowledged in the tourism policy along with a possible direction about how to face such challenge. This is an issue directly relevant to tourism since many of the national tourists' attractions and destinations are located in the coastal areas including a few islands (e.g. Saint Martin Island). The susceptibility of coastal tourism destinations to climate change issues has been highlighted by Santos-Lacueva et al. (2017) while referring content analysis of relevant tourism policy. In Bangladesh, the extant policy document missed clearly this key issue.

Policymaking that takes place without sufficient analysis of data can create policy complexities and result in policy failure. Bangladesh while planning the national tourism policy obviously has to include the most updated data and information. These have to be valid and reliable too to avoid any complexities. Consultation with relevant expert can be a solution. However, in this regard, the country suffers seriously such as BPC and BTB being the National Tourism Agencies are both unable to provide updated statistical data on their official websites or in their various reports. While talking to experts, industry experts claim that lack of data to support decision-making is the responsibility of the public bodies such as BTB; government expert (representing a government agency) however acknowledges such limitations but identify lack of (existing) skilled personnel to design such platform and also urge for a joint effort (industry, academia, and government) to create an organized platform for tourism database in the country. Lack of data availability is not a

persistent case for under-resourced developing countries. Kennell and Chaperon (2013) have noted that the United Kingdom's earlier tourism policy suffers from lack of information, which causes difficulties in policy analysis. This lack of reliable data provides a rationale for the approach taken in this research—critically examining the tourism policy in Bangladesh from the perspectives of its stakeholders.

Alongside data availability, another issue is about policy delivery or policy visibility. The NTP needs to be made widely available and accessible in major languages. Since, the internet is an influential platform, any update relevant to the policy needs to be adjusted immediately. The NTP of Bangladesh is only available in Bengali. When developing countries are increasingly adopting multilingual websites to reach diverse domestic and international audiences, the monolingual feature of tourism policy of Bangladesh somehow leaves a ground for confusion and raises complexities for interested researchers (maybe from other countries) to conduct policy analysis research (Hassan and Kokkranikal 2018).

A sound policy always requires a research base on which public policy is formulated. Tourism policies and plan if not supported by empirical evidence rather merely lead by a government and political will can only result in confusions (Fayos-Solá 1996), which is the current scenario of tourism policy in Bangladesh. Acknowledgement of such knowledge is made in the NTP, more specifically in Chap. 6 (see Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism 2010: p. 10). However, depth research cannot be feasible if there is lack of funding to conduct the research. The policy document fails to give a direction about how funding would be generated for research activities in tourism. Lack of funding coupled with unavailability of primary yet essentials data on tourism sectors create hindrances for knowledge creation and diffusion process. A chain reaction of such complexities comes with incapacity of research and/or lack of expertise in tourism industry. Moreover, absence of recognition, motivation, and sufficient funding normally results in declination of the experts in this sector. Lack of expertise with clear knowledge about the trends in global tourism along with innate understanding about the local requirement poorly reflected in the overall formulation and implementation of current tourism policy in Bangladesh.

A final observation on the tourism policy document of Bangladesh is about the missing link of risk and crisis management. A major health risk can be exposed as tourists traveling from abroad may have contagious diseases. For example, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), Swine Flu, and Foot and Mouth diseases created havoc on international mobility and caused temporary devastation in destinations and amongst tourism businesses (Telfer and Hashimoto 2015; Telfer and Sharply 2016). This is a particular point to note given the ongoing spread of a global pandemic due to novel corona virus (COVID-19), which utterly stuck the whole world. Apart from such natural crises events, there might be human-made events that require disaster and crisis management skills such one of the heinous terrorist attacks in the history of Bangladesh at 'Holey Artisan Bakery' on 1 July 2016. This is not a common scenario happens every day thus must be addressed through contingency planning. A question remains- what does a tourism policy to do with such risk and crisis issues? In this connection, a tourism policy can adapt a

“metagovernance” approach, such an adaptation may direct and lead to coordinated yet flexible self-organizing bodies at destination (local) levels to deal risk and crisis issues in parallel with the conventional governance mechanisms (Amore and Hall 2017). On this note, the contrasting relationship of neo-liberalism and tourism governance is possibly mediated by the “hyperneoliberal” philosophy to address issues on a global-local scale (Amore and Hall 2017; Simmons 2017).

To conclude, so far there is largely any monitoring and feedback system established to oversee the progress in tourism policy outcomes. The concerned authority must pay heed to this since without such a mechanism it is not possible to trace the progress and establish a benchmark. Again, this is important for an ever changing industry such as ‘Tourism and Hospitality’ in which things change more rapidly than anticipated. Together with the absence of monitoring and feedback system, the identified challenges (as discussed under this section) are essentially required to be adapted in the future NTP development of Bangladesh. In doing so, it is expected that tourism development efforts will be inclusive while attaining desirable policy outcomes.

Conclusion

This chapter critically evaluates the tourism policy of Bangladesh and explore a number issues for future considerations towards the development of further tourism-related policy instruments. Tourism policy is essentially a domain of public policy that is developed and administered by relevant government institutions. For Bangladesh tourism policy, Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism is the apex body to carry out such policy in cooperation with its two associated agencies namely BPC and BTB. The authors develop a framework in which policy governance, policy conditions, and policy cycles within a tourism context of Bangladesh have undergone critical evaluations. Findings emphasize region-based policy requirements, adaptation and guidance for e-governance and metagovernance approaches towards the devolution of centralized authority and power when integrating all these in a national-level policy. The tourism policymakers in Bangladesh must not ignore the broader macro-environmental issues that might have a significant bearing upon the performances and outcomes of tourism policy. Finally, typical policy cycle issues that need to be considered include accommodating key pressure groups’ voices in the contents of a tourism policy, highlighting market segmentations, developing carrying capacities for destinations, engaging destination (local) communities, incorporating climate change concerns, developing data framework, proper knowledge management, and finally accommodating risk and crisis management plan for potential crises events (in reference to the previous events). In particular, an inclusive tourism policy and relevant instruments are preferred for supporting tourism development in Bangladesh. Nevertheless, the policy and planning documents have to be updated and adjusted after a certain time frame to coexist with ever changing dimensions of tourism and hospitality industry.

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