Tourism Development Policy and the Use of Scenario Analysis: A synthesis model

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Abstract: COVID-19's pandemic made us learn to live with a renewed sense of limits and a new level of uncertainty. One of the governance responses that emerged from this panorama was the shift to scenario analysis, which generates narratives about multiple future possibilities. This paper attempts to answer the question of why and how to use scenario analysis when defining tourism development policy. In this study, a semi-systematic investigation is conducted to broaden the scope of discussion and explore new paths associated with the topic of tourism development policy. It is believed that the use of scenarios in tourism development policy can prove to be a valuable experimental technique for developing innovative ideas. With that end, this paper proposes a scenario development process model for policy and decision makers. As in any exploratory study, there are limitations, including the difficulty to generalising certain assumptions.

Keywords: Scenario analysis; COVID-19; Policy makers; Scenario Development Process; Tourism development policy.

Política de desarrollo turístico y uso del análisis de escenarios: Un modelo de síntesis

Resumen: La pandemia de COVID-19 nos hizo aprender a vivir con un renovado sentido de los límites y un nuevo nivel de incertidumbre. Una de las respuestas de gobernanza que surgió de este panorama fue el cambio al análisis de escenarios, que genera narrativas sobre múltiples posibilidades futuras. Este artículo trata de responder a las preguntas de por qué y cómo utilizar el análisis de escenarios al definir la política de desarrollo turístico. Sobre este estudio se opta por realizar una revisión semissistemática con la intención de ampliar el campo de discusión y explorar nuevos caminos vinculados a la temática de la política de desarrollo turístico. Uno sugiere que, en lo que respecta a la política de desarrollo turístico, el uso de escenarios puede resultar una técnica experimental valiosa para desarrollar ideas innovadoras. Con ese fin, en este artículo se propone un modelo de proceso de desarrollo de escenarios para formuladores de políticas y tomadores de decisiones. Como en todo estudio exploratorio existen limitaciones, entre ellas la dificultad de generalizar ciertas suposiciones.

Palabras Clave: Análisis de escenarios; COVID-19; Responsables políticos; Proceso de desarrollo de escenarios; Política de desarrollo turístico.

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1. Introduction

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemics, there is a need to understand the current density in the content of reflection and analysis, and the simplicity in decoding issues that are so complex, current, interesting, challenging and of great relevance for the political-contemporary tourism development. Policies represent the result of the recognition that supports the development of tourism, having the possibility to increase the sector's contribution to economic growth and employment creation, while at the same time, addressing other key challenges presented to us (UNWTO-UNEP, 2012).

The potentialities of scenario analysis recommend its use by policy makers in general and also for those responsible for tourism development policy. Thus, and before COVID-19 pandemic, tourism development was widely defended by tourists, entrepreneurs and governments, and in particular by Destination Management Organisations (DMO's) (Stratigea & Katsoni, 2015).

Scenarios are essentially reasonable and well-structured stories that help to foresee how the future political-economic world will look like, in a way that makes the policy challenges stand out (Barma et al., 2016), and how they would look like in the tourism world after COVID-19.

Perhaps, only a scenario analysis within the pandemic situation and afterwards would allow policy and decision makers in tourism destinations to design a holistic strategic planning with and integrated and future perspective. The post COVID–19 pandemic comes with challenges and opportunities (WEF, 2020) that takes into consideration, all the production and resources on which tourism relies. This results in the return of tourism development as they imagine it– in accordance with their vision.

The present study investigates how this methodological knowledge framework can be made productive for researchers, to policy makers and decision makers in the context of tourism policy design and implementation, especially under the present uncertainties.

The article proceeds as follows. First, it makes a foray into the various meanings of public policy and explains why it is so important to deal with this issue. It then discusses tourism public policy showing that its implementation in the national, regional and local contexts can determine the inherent tourism development direction and outcomes. Going forward, it is suggested that scenario analysis can play an exceptional and decisive role in anticipating and overcoming constraints for tourism policy and planning implementation. Later, scenario process development is addressed to show why amid COVID-19 preparation for the future does not require precise forecasting, but a body of knowledge upon which to base praxis, an ability to learn from experience, and a keen interest in what is happening in the present. If this is carried out well, DMOs can respond or adapt to change promptly and effectively in a suitable way. Finally, the main findings are discussed, and the paper concludes with a summary of what was accomplished with it, ideas for future research and final remarks on the contribution of this study for research.

2. Methodology

In order to explore issues related to scenario analysis and tourism policy development, a semi-systematic research method was used, relying merely on the existing literature. This sort of review helps in identifying relevant theoretical perspectives and other qualitative data related to the topic the researcher wants to explore (Snyder, 2019). Thus, this paper is exploratory and aims to expand the debate on this particular topic, i.e., to bring new insights and perspectives to tourism development policy and the use of scenarios analysis by governments and destination management organisations as a preparation for a world after COVID-19 pandemic.

In this context, Hollinshead (2004, p.73) appears to point out that "almost all qualitative analysis can only ever be partial, and therefore open-ended, forms of inquiry; many researchers believe they can only ever yield 'findings' tentatively held, and never 'results' firmly concluded". Therefore, in our study we adopted the conceptualisation of Quivy and Campenhoudt (2008, p.104) who tell us that, "the problem is the theoretical approach or perspective that one decides to adopt to address the problem placed for the starting question. It is a way of interrogating the studied phenomena".

Thus, a certain amount of limitations exists when conducting an exploratory study, since one is making an interpretation of the reality and trying to discover something new and interesting (Swedberg, 2020), it is only possible to draw up hypothesis, and its verification is beyond the reach of the researcher.

3. Public Policy

When analysing the concept of policy and its use, it is first necessary to clarify its meaning (Wes, 1996). Likely, the most renowned, shortest and intuitive definition of public policy has been given to us by Thomas Dye (1972, p.2) "anything a government chooses to do or not to do". Jenkins (1978, p.6), on the other hand, proposes a more precise conceptualization of public policy, defining it as "a set of interrelated decisions taken by a political actor or group of actors regarding the selection of objectives and the means of achieving them within a specified situation where those decisions should, in principle, be within the power of those actors to achieve".

Hogwood and Gunn (1984) stated that there are dissimilar ways to understand 'policy': as a label for an area of activity (e.g. tourism policy); as an expression of intent (e.g. "we will improve tourism supply"); as specific proposals (e.g. a tourism programme); as resolutions of a government and the formal regulation (e.g. specific tourism legislation); a programme or a legislation package, staffing and funding, intermediate and ultimate results (e.g. better prepared tourism professionals); outcomes or what is really achieved (tourism supply); and a process and/or series of decisions.

Anderson (2003, p.2) prefers a conceptualisation of policy that emphasises actions rather than intentions such as "A relatively stable, purposive course of action followed by an actor or group of actors in dealing with a problem or matter of concern". This definition centers its attention on what has been done, instead of what is only suggested or willed. It differentiates a policy from a resolution, which is inherently a specific choice among several options, and considers policy as something that takes time to reveal itself.

According to Knill & Tosun (2008), policy making is characterised by the presence of several restrictions, the existence of multiple policy processes and a never-ending cycle of policies and decisions (policy cycle processes), through which the last stage leads necessarily straight back to the first one. This means that the policy cycle is continuous and functions like an endless loop.

Paul Carney (2012, p.22), give us a broader definition for public policy which is as follows: "public policy is important because the scope of the state extends to almost all aspects of our life. However, it is just one of many denominations in political science – like democracy, equality and power – that are well known but difficult to define".

For Peters (2021), policies are design to solve one or more problems in society, and no policy can be effective unless it has a clear understanding of the socio-economic dynamics that have produced or are producing the problem(s), nonetheless these are always subject to interpretations.

As this etymological discussion indicates, public policy is something complex to define, and it depends on a number of constituent variables, since they exist as combinations of objectives and means assembled and actioned by a multitude of authoritative policy actors operating in an environment of multiple interacting actors and organisations operating in the course time and in the geographical space (Howlett & Cashore, 2014).

Finally, on the basis of this idea, a question can be raised based on this particular thought, "which elements of community life might be amenable to policies that promote the subjective well-being of community members?" (Ressler et al., 2021, p.823), and it is imperative that policy makers always have this in consideration. Because, what one could define as 'good policy', is the one that involves bringing together a series of components (including communities) and processes previously designed to intervene in society and economy (Peters, 2021).

4. Tourism Public Policy and Policy Implementation

Tourism public policy, more than any other policy, is influenced by economic, social, cultural and environmental factors, as well as by the government's formal and informal organisations and other characteristics of the political system. Baum and Szivas (2008) allude to the fact that government's keen interest in tourism and in the sector's development is widely known, yet scholars' discussion about the form and level of such involvement is limited. Others, such as Aimilia et al. (2012, p.482) stated that: "tourism has always been used as a 'fundamental tool' for local development, since tourist consumption in the production are is multifaceted linked to all local economic activities (agriculture, fishing, handicrafts, etc.), and has a multiple and significant effect on the production and social structure".

Tourism policy and strategies at national, regional and local contexts determine the inherent tourism development direction, prospects or potential. However, in the case of tourism, the policies of local and regional governments have a more far-reaching impact on the development of tourism than the national ones.

The issue of policy implementation matter is extremely pressing for the tourism sector, as countless tourism plans and policies are not or just partially applied, creating a gap between what was intended and what was accomplished (Martins, 2018). This problem has a grand significance as it reflects government goals and intentions, as well as the extent to which governments can turn these intentions into actions (Krutwaysho & Bramwell, 2010).

In the opinion of Dredge and Jenkins (2007, p.10) "policy involves considering and debating the political agenda, what the issues are, who is or will be involved or affected, and the alternative courses of action to address these problems". This underlines the idea that governments play a crucial role in the execution of tourism policies. Thus, the implementation of a tourism policy considerably relies on the wider political, economic and social environment (Elliot, 1997; OECD, 2010).

One should understand that tourism policy making, and its implementation are of key importance due to its varied nature and the entanglement in inter-institutional relations and concerted policy making (Wang & Ap, 2013; Sharma, 2017). Therefore, given the relevance of the level of execution to the success of a destination, appropriate tourism policy implementation by DMOs can have a profound impact on its development. DMOs play a decisive role in the implementation of tourism development policies and strategies, while organisations that are under the wings of the local, regional or national governments, and (usually) have political and legislative power as well as financial autonomy. However, sometimes, due to several reasons, barriers to the tourism policy implementation seem insurmountable. Perhaps, the best comprehensive assessment of the most usual blockades to tourism policy execution is provided to us by Dodds (2007), who identifies barriers to the application of sustainable tourism policies contained in a Local Agenda 21 Plan for Calvia (Mallorca-Spain). The barriers to its implementation included a lack of prior planning, lack of homogenisation of regional and national policy priorities, insubstantial enthusiasm among stakeholders to the plan in the long term, scarce political will to implement the policies, and a focus on short-term gains and economic issues rather than on long-term social and environmental benefits.

On the other hand, Martins (2018), who analysed the Barcelona Strategic Tourism Plan (2010-2015) concluded that there was a lack of political will to enforce the measures included in the plan. Of the 55 measures included in it, only one was fully achieved and the execution of the measures achieved an average of only 55%. This shows that although there was a political will to elaborate a strategic tourism plan, the planning partially failed due to the lack of political will to enforce it. Identifying problems its easy but solving them is a completely different story.

Often, in the face to critical problems such as the COVID-19 pandemic or even climate changes, policies may not be able to provide adequate responses due to cognitive failures to perceive the risks (Kemmerling & Makszin, 2018; Bavel et.al., 2020).

5. Scenario Analysis and Public Tourism Policy

Probably in futures studies, the great consensus existing is the idea that there is no academic consensus regarding the application of theory to support scenario methodology (Spaniol & Rowland, 2018). Nevertheless, scenario analysis can play an exceptional and decisive role on anticipating and overcoming constraints to tourism policy and planning implementation such as the one presented in Calvia (Mallorca - Spain), but also can help destinations to adapt faster to unforeseen events such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Scenarios have also been used to back up the questioning considerations about public policy (Massé, 1966; Hughes, 2013). However, although national governments and other political institutions still undertake scenario or other future planning activities (Blossom, 2011), confirmation that scenarios play a significant and influential role in the policy process is harder to unveil. A review made by Volkery and Ribeiro (2009) on the use of scenarios in public policy has shown that there is a lack of evidence of their major influence on policymaking. As example of this is the recent study produced by UN/ECLAC (United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2020) which shows that although a scenario analysis was made by it for 2020 and 2021, the subsequent

report clearly shows that its state members did not use it as a basis for policy action to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on tourism.

According to Barma et al. (2016), scenario analysis is primarily seen as a tool or technique for examining the soundness of a particular strategy. It can lead decision-makers to deviate from the usual deductions regarding the present-day trends so that they can take advantage of unforeseen opportunities and also protect themselves from probable adverse exogenous shocks.

Policy makers should always bear in mind that public policies can be changed based on new or better information about their effects. This is of paramount importance as policy makers and decision makers are certain to face strategic decisions with uncertain long-term results. These outcomes are often linked with a multiplicity of factors that are very difficult to predict because they have little or no control over them (Volkery & Ribeiro, 2009; Walker et al., 2019).

We know from the literature that techniques can be considered either technical or subjective. Nevertheless, it can be said that both present challenges for tourism policy makers when seeking to design policies based on evidence/facts. Concerning policy, scenario analysis can serve multiple distinct functions (Blossom, 2011):

- Defining the agenda, identifying subjects that need to be addressed by policy in way to explore uncertainties;
- Policy development, including a long-term assessment on the impact of policies;

Identification of long-term subjects unconnected to policy development or to the predefined agenda that may eventually be incorporated into the agenda or/and in policy development.

Following Bibri (2018), it can be said that the effectiveness of scenario analysis studies in tourism policy lies in defining a wider conceptual framework that helps in the discussion about the future, as well as a contribution to tourism policy designing and to the rise of new prospects sustained in long-term decisions.

The strength and importance of the use of scenarios in tourism policy today, in the midst of this COVID-19 pandemic, lies in the fact that it is possible to introduce uncommon combinations of probable realities, which helps individuals to break with their usual conservative ways of thinking and analysing, which will result in deliberate discontinuities in narratives about the future. This capability of imagining alternative futures through a structured analytical process will help policy makers to adapt to something completely different from what they are used to (Barma et al., 2016).

6. The Process of Scenario Development

Since the beginning of times, that mankind has been trying to develop methods to foresee the future. In the last years, researchers with different backgrounds have developed qualitative and quantitative methods to logically forecast the future. One must recognize that many divergent future scenarios are likely to happen, and that what lies ahead is yet far from the possibility of being known with absolute certainty (Bibri, 2018; Lempert, 2019). Therefore, preparing for what lies ahead obviously does not require an accurate prediction, rather than that, it requires information upon which we can base our actions, a capacity to learn from experience, monitoring what is happening in the present, and thriving and resilient organisations that can effectively answer or adjust successfully to changes (Crow & Sarewitz, 2001; Sarta et al., 2020).

Like Bostrom (2009) and others, e.g. Adams (2015) refer that it is useless to focus our attention in the most probable future scenario unless one can suppose that this will somehow unveil stable trends or otherwise show with absolute certainty what will happen next.

Scenario approaches can be regarded as methods of the future, and scenario analysis as an intricate set of methods that without exception incorporates several different methodological steps or phases (Kosow & Gaßner, 2008; Ramirez et al., 2015). Although scenarios are far from being built in a standardized way, similarities can be observed between the various models proposed in literature. Therefore, and basing ourselves in the models proposed by Bood and Postma (1997), Godet (2000), Brands et al. (2013), Stratigea and Katsoni (2015), and Spaniol and Rowland (2019) one advances with the following framework for a scenario development process (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The process of Scenario Development (Synthesis)
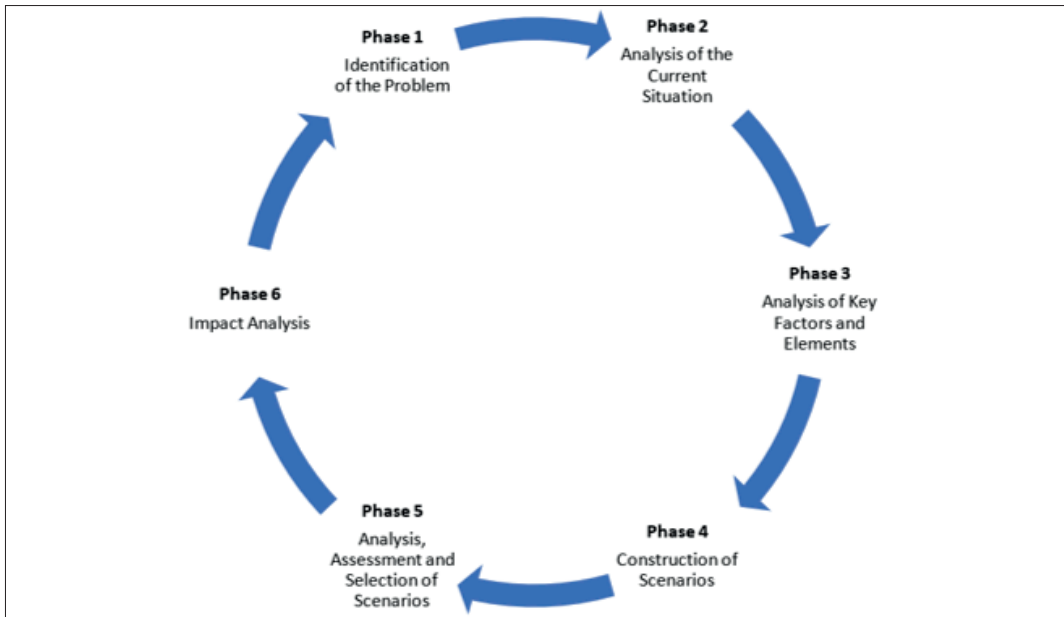
Source: Elaborated by the authors

Phase 1 – Identification of the Problem

Any scenario process begins with the identification of a focal issue or decision which represents the real issue to policy makers and/or other decision makers. It is imperative to define precisely the propose for which scenarios are to be developed 'What explicitly is the problem?' 'How will the scenario be developed?' 'What must it integrate?' and of equal importance 'What will be left out of consideration?'

Phase 2 – Analysis of the Current Situation

Making the analysis of the current conditions ("Where are we now?") important factors are identified. In this phase it is possible to identify strengths and weaknesses once they relate to external opportunities and threats, so PESTLE and SWOT analysis may serve as useful tools. It is very important to analyse the current situation because some factors that can determine the future can already be perceptible in the present.

Phase 3 – Analysis of Key-Factors and Elements

This step requires working out a description of the scenario in what concerns to its key factors. It is important to understand the system as a whole and the comprehension of the elements that constitute it helps to do just that. Key factors are those variables, trends, developments and events that should and must receive close attention during the course of the scenario development process. This classification (which factors are focused on, and why?) constitute a crucial step when it comes to scenario development process since there is some unpredictability that determine the differences between scenarios. There are many possibilities to carry this out, but it will always contain intuitive and creative aspects, and these are essential in way to visualize/predict the various possible future developments of any key factor.

Phase 4 – Construction of Scenarios

Scenarios are intricate systems whose elements have a multitude of interrelationships. Nevertheless, to be accepted by policy makers and/or decision makers, the constructed scenarios must be comprehensible, practical and congruous. They do not need to reflect the 'most probable future' or the 'worst', as such qualifications come without meaning given the number of future uncertainties. Even though multiple scenarios can be theoretically conceivable, to process them cognitively, it can only be made in limited numbers.

Phase 5 – Analysis, Assessment and Selection of Scenarios

This process of analysis, assessment and selection may take place, using as many scenarios as the ones vital to cover a sufficient number of perspectives and possible outcomes, but reducing its number to the minimum possible, in order to assure that the process keeps being doable. Then, they can then be analysed and interpreted by policy makers and/or decision-makers within the context of the issues they have before them and the measures that they must take.

Phase 6 – Impact Analysis

In this phase, policy makers and/or decision-makers analyse the impact of their actions, including:
1) The impact of the actions, by measuring changes in outcomes.
2) Determining if changes in results can be attributed to their efforts.
3) To balance relative impacts of actions with different key-factors.
4) Must be done an assessment of the relative cost-benefit or/and cost-effectiveness of a measure, where the following should be considered:
· Immediate, intermedium, and long-term results and impacts.
· Observable switches in target behaviour, awareness, attitudes or knowledge.
· Impacts on long-term indicators.
· Indicators that show progress towards outcome or impact.
· Costs of measures execution.
· Cost savings resulting from measures execution.

In view of its plurality, however, the scenario method must not be uniquely attributed to any of the aforementioned ways of imagining the future. Notably, the comprehension of the future, which is fundamental to the scenario technique, is marked primarily by the fact that its starting point is not an unavoidable future, but rather a series of numerous and diverse feasible futures (Kosow & Gaßner, 2008; Fauré et al., 2017).

Considering what Khakee (1991) and Ramirez et al. (2015) have stated, it can be said that given the diversity of methodological ideas, there is no series of rules for building scenarios for tourism under COVID-19 pandemic uncertainty or other future situations, nevertheless, Figure 1 shows a possible path to follow.

7. Findings and Discussion

One agrees with Dodds (2007, p.297 when she says that, "research on the implementation of tourism policy is weak" and consequently there is a clear need for research on this topic. However, it is not only in this subject of study that lacks research, but also a lack of research on scenario analysis linked to tourism and to tourism policy, a gap that this paper attempts to fulfill.

Likewise, the literature on scenario analysis was developed mainly for sectors other than tourism, and just a few references exist on the tourism public policy development and its implementation. Taking the example of the study of Dodds (2007), who identifies barriers to the execution of sustainable tourism policies contained in the context of Local Agenda 21 plan for Calvia (Mallorca – Spain), our research shows that scenario analysis, if carried out in a participatory way, can help to mobilise the different stakeholders and avoid the emergence of gaps between tourism development policy and its implementation. In the future, it can trigger a cultural change in the way institutions and organisations address the unexpected by becoming more adaptive and thus more resilient to external changes (Selin, 2006; Eriksson & Weber, 2008; Duchek, 2020).

Furthermore, there is a lack of collaborative policymaking, and the problem is that each stakeholder, including the political ones, thinks differently depending on their interests and fails to see the benefits of acting together – there is a lack of shared responsibility (Vellecco & Mancino, 2010; Hudson et al., 2019). As our paper shows, the several stakeholders are not aware of the importance of scenario analysis in tourism to prepare public policymaking for the shocks that future developments may bring and to better manage them at an early stage.

The findings also suggest that the use of scenario analysis by DMOs policy makers and decision makers can provide actionable clarity in understanding and predicting global issues, as well as challenges resulting from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and to prevent or even avoid gaps between tourism development policy and strategic planning implementation. However, this requires institutions and organisations to develop flexible and adaptive scenario formats and processes that promote the contrast between open and closed formats considering also the interaction of many or few actors (Eriksson & Weber, 2008; Duchek,

2020). To this end, a synthesis is proposed (Figure 1) that can help tourism policy makers, decision makers and planning makers to elaborate better theory-based scenarios and define what they need to do at each step of the way. It is felt that this is a viable and useful tool to help them develop scenarios. But this is only a proposal that seeks to be a contribution to the discussion. One must reaffirm that any exploratory study has its limitations, including the difficulty of generalising certain assumptions.

8. Final Considerations

This paper is a reflexive work that uses the different approaches and meanings of public tourism policy and scenario analysis in order to define different analytical dimensions related to these concepts. This paper also attempts to answer the following question: What are scenarios and why and how can they be used in defining tourism development policy for the post COVID-19 world? And it is our understanding that such objective has been successfully achieved.

COVID-19 pandemic has brought many challenges in many countries, regions and places, and policy makers must respond to these needs. They must not forget that even before the pandemic, communities were already very concerned with the environmental degradation, human rights issues, the links between policy makers and economic elites, and the huge economic gap that usually accompanies tourism (Guo et al., 2019).

Adapting to change implies that without cooperative actions, tourism activity will not develop as policy makers want and envision, leading to a deterioration in the competitiveness of their destinations. Furthermore, it is easier to identify development issues in tourism than to address these same problems. The essential part of policy decision-making around the world became the use of the word 'sustainable' as a development goal without existing an agreement on its meaning (Jenckins, 2015).

Policy is a rather complex construct and a definite definition is still missing. Nevertheless, all policy guidelines, plans, actions and regulations that are used to solve public problems. To simplify the understanding of policy making processes, theoretical frameworks, models, methods and techniques are usually designed. Scenarios have a temporal property with roots in the future and should be feasible and plausible while assuming the proper form of a story or narrative description (Spaniol & Rowland, 2018).

In summary, much more research is needed on scenario analysis in the context of tourism policy development, particularly in relation to pandemic. Existing research is still scarce, so this paper should be considered as a further contribution to understanding how tourism policy makers and decision makers can address the post COVID-19 problematic through scenario analysis.

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