

**RELATIONSHIPS WITH MANY FACETS:  
UNPACKING THE INTERACTIONS BETWEEN  
PROTECTED AREA MANAGERS AND  
COMMERCIAL TOUR OPERATORS**

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## **DECLARATION**

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research, unless otherwise stated. It contains, as its main content, work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary institution.

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28 June 2007

## **ABSTRACT**

For protected areas worldwide, commercial tour operators are increasingly providing the services and products desired and needed by visitors to these areas. Given the engagement of both protected area managers and tour operators in protected areas, and inevitably with each other, it is critical that their relationship and its complexities are clearly understood. As such, the interests of managers and operators overlap insofar as that they work in the same locales, share some of the burden of service provision, and aim to offer a quality product. However, this study shows that they diverge in other ways, particularly given the commercial imperative that necessarily strongly influences the activities of their business, irrespective of its location. This thesis seeks to unpack the complexities of a relationship that is critically important both in terms of the quality of the tourism experiences offered by protected areas, and the conservation of such areas in the longer term. In order to obtain an understanding of the complexity of the interactions between protected area managers and tour operators, qualitative research methods were used, in which in-depth interviews provided a rich picture of the important diverse aspects and facets impacting on their relationships.

This study found that both managers and operators considered the purpose of protected areas to be the conservation of biodiversity and their recreational use and enjoyment. Surprisingly, their similar values were unknown to them. A major influence on their relationships was their perceptions of power, with 'dominant' power largely based on legislative and regulatory mandates, perceived to rest with the protected area managers. In contrast, this study also found evidence of 'resistant' power. This form of Foucauldian power was held particularly by operators in one geographic locale, and was associated with the concepts of

cultural groupings and groupthink. The underlying public policy context influenced the effectiveness of the collaborative efforts of managers and operators. Interwoven with these differences were variable expectations regarding the nature and purpose of communication and what collaboration might 'mean'. These findings importantly suggest several future directions for both practice and research. First, managers and operators share values and hold both similar and different expectations and perceptions, similarities and differences which are significant. Secondly, understanding the importance of power and how it is exercised is critical if successful relationships between managers and operators are to be fostered. Finally, further unpackaging of the meaning of communication and collaboration for managers and operators, a process initiated in this study, is essential if relationships between these groups involved in conservation and recreation in protected areas are to be improved. Therefore, this study suggests that their collaboration can be enhanced at individual, organisational/locale and policy levels, by adopting and implementing an action research framework.

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