



# Examining governance and growth of the hotel sector in Malawi: An environmental metabolic rift perspective

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## Abstract

This paper criticizes the hotel sector's development pathway that the government of Malawi has pursued since independence in 1964. The focus of this paper is on the institutional and legal framework available that guides hotel sector development and operations in Malawi. Studies have shown that the institutional and legal framework of the country helps shape institutional behaviour and practice towards greening practices in the hotel sector. The limited evidence from sub – Saharan Africa indicates that most countries do not have effective greening regulations such that the hotel sector is at the center stage of the ecological metabolic rift. This study used a qualitative methodology whereby key informant interviews were conducted in selected government departments which work towards regulating the development and operations of the hotel sector in Malawi. The results revealed that the institutional and legal framework available in Malawi is weak in the sense that it lacks appropriate policing tools and overlooks green practices within the hotel sector. Furthermore, the results show there is a lack of collaboration between relevant stakeholders on efforts to 'green' the hotel sector in Malawi. Collaborative improvements of the institutional and legal framework would likely serve to improve greening of the hotel sector in Malawi. This paper, therefore, contributes to the body of knowledge available on the attitude that the private sector has towards the natural environment in Malawi and sub-Saharan Africa at large.

**Keywords:** Legal framework, green practices, hotel sector, natural environment, and metabolic rift

## Introduction

Tourism is the worlds' fastest growing sector in most economies, which is projected to reach 1.8 billion international tourist arrivals in various destinations by the year 2030 (Gosling & Hall, 2006). These projections correlate with the UNWTO (2015) which stipulates that tourism has the potential to contribute directly or indirectly to the proposed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). An ever-increasing number of tourism destinations worldwide have been established which has increased investments in the hotel sector (Alzboun, 2014). This means the creation of jobs and businesses, an increase in export revenues, and infrastructural development in the destination country (UNWTO, 2015).

Globally, according to the UNWTO (2013) tourism financial receipts increased to US\$ 1,075 billion in 2012 from US\$ 1,042 billion in 2011. This increase is in line with an experienced 4% growth in arrivals during the same period. Sub - Sahara Africa contributed US\$24.2 billion slightly lower than some of the world's most popular destinations – the Caribbean at US\$ 24.5 billion (UNWTO, 2015). Prospects in 2015, according to the UNWTO, were high such that the Asian - Pacific and the American zones recorded a 4% and 5% increase in tourist arrivals, respectively. Europe and the Middle East also recorded an increase of about 3 – 4% and 2 – 5% respectively. At around the same time in Africa, there was a 3 – 5% increase in tourist



arrivals (UNWTO, 2015). Similar developments are taking place in Malawi (Tourism Intelligence International, 2008a).

Available evidence suggests that during the year 2013, Africa had received an increased total from 53.2 million to 56 million visitors traveling using different modes of transport (UNWTO, 2013). These tourists traveled by Air (52%), Road (40%), Water (6%) and Rail (2%) (UNWTO, 2015). Despite this much glorified financial gains that come with tourism it also comes with varying losses to mankind. These losses mainly come from ecological catastrophes such as loss of natural capital which impact the local people's livelihoods in the destination areas (Foster, 2013; Ashley, 2000). Markham, et al. (2016) state that the tourism industry is responsible for about 5% of the global carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuel combustion. Furthermore, available evidence suggests that the concentration of greenhouse gases and carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has increased now and is greater than at any time in the past 800,000 years (International Tourism Partnership, 2016). These greenhouse gases are amongst the contributing factors to an ecological metabolic rift which is a threat to tourism and the livelihoods of people in the destination area (Houdre', 2011; Auerbach & Clark, 2018). In this regard, therefore, the hotel sector is encouraged by various stakeholders to help reduce these greenhouse gas emissions in order to mitigate ecological metabolic rift.

In most developed tourism nations such as Denmark and Spain, the hotel sector has adopted the principles of sustainable consumption and production practices (SCPPs) which are seen as a pathway to mitigating ecological metabolism rift (Bisgaard, Henriksen, & Bjerre, 2012 & Aragon-Corra, Martin-Tapia, & Torre-Ruiz, 2015). According to Alvarez (2014), SCPPs is facilitated by:

- Formulation of the institutional and legal framework that guides sustainable consumption and production practices.
- A proactive planning practice that reduces usage and wastage of resources.
- Implementation of recycling, reusing and waste conservation.

In most developed countries the government and the private sector have realised that economic development that ignores the wellbeing of the natural environment is not sustainable (Alvarez, 2014; Warren, Becken & Coghlan, 2017; Environmental Audit Committee, 2017). In this regard therefore, the government and the private sector have jointly formulated institutional and legal frameworks that enforce behavioural change to foster sustainable environmental management practices in all sectors of economic development including the hotel sector (Bisgaard, Henriksen, & Bjerre, 2012; Bruns-Smith, Choy, Chong, & Verma, 2015; Warren et al., 2017).

Available evidence suggests that there is a desire to attain economic development in most developing countries through the tourism sector, without considering the impact that such development has on the natural environment and this brings about environmental related catastrophes that affect mankind (Bellamy, 1999, 2013). In developing countries, there has been a rush into attaining wealth in order to promote economic development (Hulse, 2007). However, according to Musavengane (2018); Kubanza, KumarDas, and Simatele, (2016); Leonard and Dlamini (2014), there are challenges in integrating sustainability issues in institutional policy and legal frameworks which could help shape institutional and individual behaviour towards sustainable environmental management. It is assumed that because of these challenges the hotel sector in most developing countries and sub – Saharan Africa, in particular, does not take sustainable environmental management practices seriously, hence its contribution to ecological metabolic rift (Somerville, 2018; Rogerson & Sims, 2012; Van der Merwe & Wöcke, 2007).



It is against a backdrop of these observations that this study attempts to find out how the institutional policy and legal framework available in Malawi tries to shape the institutional and personal behaviour of employees in the hotel sector in efforts to promote sustainable environmental management practices in a quest to attain enhanced economic development.

### **Greening of the hotel sector in the developed world**

The nature of the tourism industry is that it is environmentally dependent, such that future developments in this industry are dependent of the state of the natural environment in a given tourism destination (Bohdanowicz, Zientara, & Novotna, 2011; Bramwell & Lane, 2012; Aragon-Correa, Martin-Tapia, & Torre-Ruiz, 2015). There have been a number of researches that have been conducted regarding the institutional behaviour towards the environment within the hotel sector in developed countries. For instance, Carasuk, Becken, and Hughey, (2016) concluded that hotels that have clear environmental management policy guidelines perform better on matters of environmental management because their operations are guided by the same. Burgos-Jiménez, Cano-Guillén, and Céspedes-Lorente(2002), also found out that the hotel management team's attitude towards the environment helps in formulating policies that guide and shape an individual employee's behaviour towards the environment, and by doing that, sustainable environmental practices are promoted within that facility. Similarly, Jang, Zheng, and Bosselman (2017) attest that leadership attitude towards the environment in a hotel helps in formulating a policy that drives environmental management issues within the facility and the surrounding stakeholders.

All these conclusions were drawn from the observations that were made in developed countries in Europe such as Britain and Spain. However, these developments did not just come about. According to Alvarez (2014), it is owed to many stakeholders including academic researchers who, during the 1980s, criticized the general policies and the daily professional practices of the hotel sector which had a negative impact on the environment. Doherty, (2013) and also Tilikiduo and Delistavrou (2015) initially observed that the goods and services that are offered by the hotel sector are resource intensive, and as such it results in a significant ecological footprint and a highly visible waste product, hence the pressure from stakeholders to force the industry to adopt sustainable environmental management practices.

In order to encourage universal acceptability of sustainable environmental practices within the hotel sector, Burgos-Jiménez, et al. (2002) and Ayuso(2007), observed that the public and private sector worked together to formulate institutional policy and legal framework to govern sustainable environmental practices.

### **Greening of the hotel sector in sub – Saharan Africa**

Many developing countries such as Ethiopia and Ghana, look at the tourism industry as a powerful and feasible force for achieving economic development because of the competitive advantage that it offers (Alzboun, 2014). However, available evidence suggests that the public and private sectors in most developing countries do not work together to come up with an effective institutional policy and legal framework to foster sustainable environmental management practices in the tourism industry. For example, Rogerson and Sims (2012), observed that in South Africa the existing institutional policy and legal framework is not effective because the public and private sector work in isolation. Krutwayshe and Bramwell (2010), also found out that there is no collaboration between the public and private sector in sustainable tourism policy implementation. This lack of collaboration according to Smith and Leonard (2018) restricts greening efforts of the hotel sector. Similarly, Musavengane and Steyn (2013) bemoan lack of effective collaboration amongst various stakeholders which hampers progress on greening the hotel sector in sub -Saharan Africa. In Malawi, Bello, Lovelock, and Carr (2016) observed that there is a lack of collaboration between the public and private sectors in sustainable tourism policy planning. The assumption, therefore, is that

the industry in Malawi is developing without following the available institutional policy and legal framework.

### The development of the hotel sector in Malawi

Malawi just like any other developing country looks at the tourism industry as the best alternative that could bring about sustainable economic development (Tourism Intelligence International, 2008b; Government of Malawi, 2000). Such that the government of Malawi formulated an institutional and policy framework that promoted the development of the tourism industry since 1994 (Tourism Intelligence International, 2008a). In the same vein, the Government of Malawi (2000), states that it created incentives which promoted investments in the tourism industry which induced the development of various hotel outlets across the country. This view is supported by Magombo, Rogerson & Rogerson, (2017) who write that by 1994 a number of unplanned accommodation outlets were developed across the country (compare figure 1 and 2) which could have an adverse impact on the natural environment. This assumption is also supported by Middleton (2013), who confirms that any form of inappropriate development disrupts the natural environment which ultimately feeds back to the development itself negatively. These studies presented thus far, provide evidence that the hotel sector in Malawi may not be developing following the stipulated institutional and legal framework. It is, therefore, the focus of this study to assess if this is the case or not.

Furthermore, the development of this sector could have an indirect negative impact on the environment through the sourcing of construction materials. For instance, Chikoti (2017) reported that the Malawi government expressed concern with sand mining practices across the country because this exercise leads to environmental catastrophes such as floods which have in recent years affected the country. In the same line of thinking, Chikoko (2017), reported that cities and other development centers across the country are now experiencing flooding which could also be attributed to sand mining, resulting from the increased demand from the ever-growing hotel sector (see figure 2).



**Figure 1.** Map of Malawi showing the distribution of accommodation units in 1974  
*Source: Magombo, et al. (2017)*

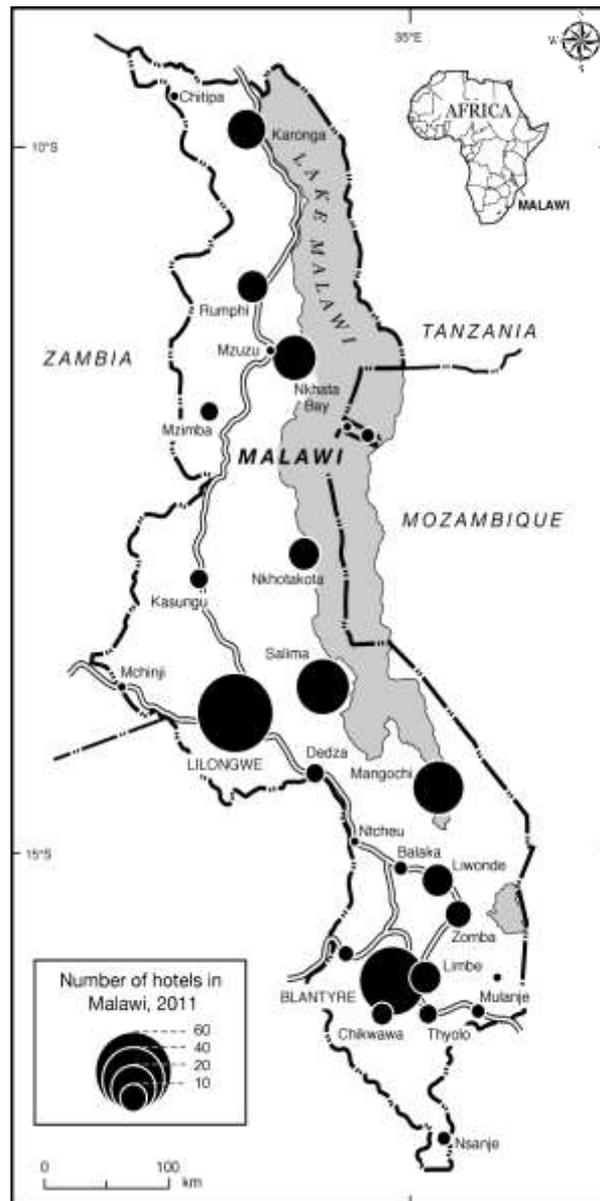


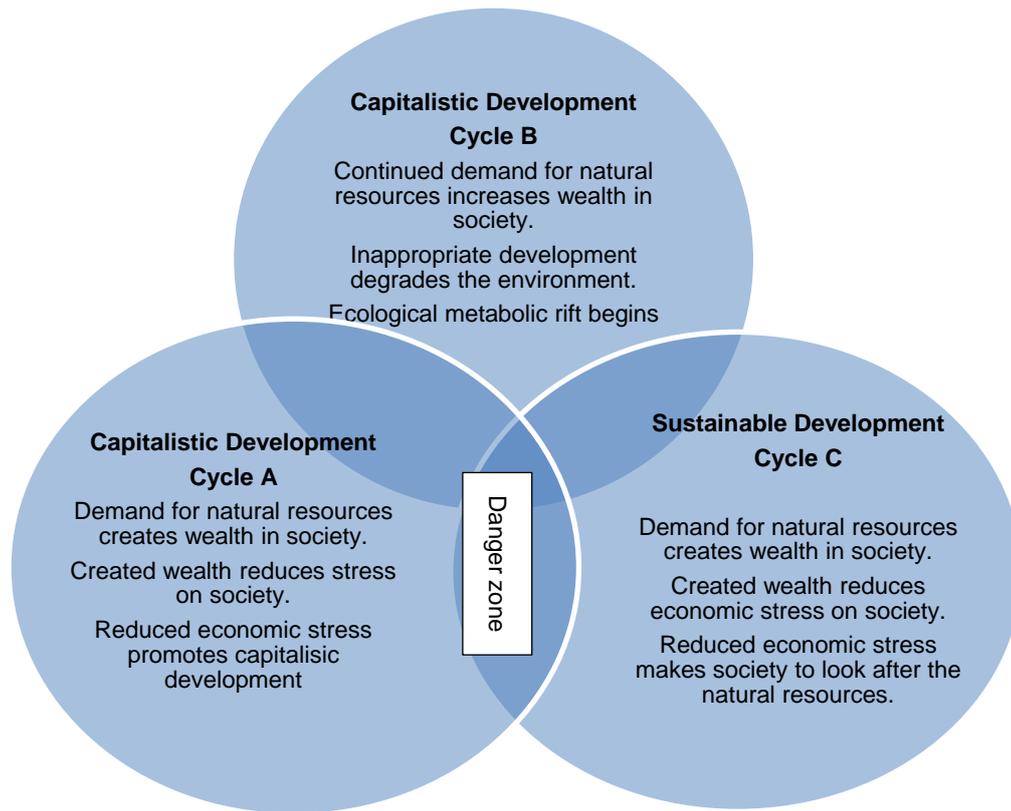
Figure 2. Map of Malawi showing the number of accommodation units after 1994  
 Source: Magombo, et al. (2017)

### Capitalism development and ecological metabolic rift

Capitalism which is in some quarters devoid of consciousness, has been blamed for the current ecological catastrophes facing society globally (Foster, 1999). Available evidence suggests that capitalism promotes development that uses natural resources to accumulate wealth without considering the needs of the future economic development needs from the same resources by future generations (Foster, 2013; Middleton, 2013).

Foster (2002) writes that capitalist economic development tendencies are geared first and foremost to the growth of profits thus to economic growth at virtually any cost which includes the exploitation of the ecology. In the same vein,

Scales (2014) also argues that capitalism's emphasis on profit and a relentless pursuit of economic growth tends to create a 'metabolic rift' within ecosystems so that in the long run, local people's livelihoods get affected because of loss on the natural capital.



**Figure 3:** Relationship between modes of development and the environment  
**Source:** Modified from Middleton, (2013)

As indicated in figure 3, capitalism development pattern in cycle A uses natural resources to create wealth for the society wellbeing (Foster et al., 2013). The improved well-being in society, according to Middleton (2013) creates a desire for more development which increases wealth and at the same time demand for natural resources. This increased demand creates pressure on the environment such that as demonstrated in cycle B ecological metabolic rift starts which then forces nature to feedback to society in the form of ecological catastrophes (Foster, 2002). This, therefore, means that the society which benefited from the environment through wealth creation now starts suffering from the consequences of their action to the natural environment because the environment upon which wealth was being created from can no longer support those activities (Middleton, 2013).

Cycle C represents sustainable development tendencies which take care of the natural environment which provides resources that creates wealth for the society (Hove, 2004). This is the development pattern which the hotel sector in developed countries adopted (Jones, et al., 2014). However as demonstrated in the figure 3, Middleton (2013) noted that this development pattern has attributes that can easily turn the development into cycles A and B. The best way of avoiding this unwanted turn around is to have an effective institutional and legal framework that regulates and monitor economic development activities (Jang, Zheng, & Bosselman, 2017).

As already alluded to in the above discussion, the Government of Malawi allowed an accelerated development of the tourism industry in order to attain economic development. In this regard, therefore, this study uses Marx's Theory of Metabolic Rift which has been applied in various studies in different economic sectors elsewhere to assess if the developments taking place in Malawi's hotel sector are capitalistic in nature or not. This result would help answer the major question of the study which is aimed to assess if the available institutional



and legal framework in Malawi averts capitalist development approaches within the hotel sector and promote the triple bottom line approach (Bisgaard, et al, 2012).

For instance, Auerbach and Clark (2018) used this theory to conclude that capitalist logging violates the universal metabolism of nature which leads to distinct ecological rifts. Similarly, Deutsch (2018), used this approach to conclude that capitalism exacerbates social inequalities which eventually results in ecological rift. On the other hand, Somerville, (2018) is of the view that most governments are captured in such capitalistic development tendencies with very little interest in following other ecological friendly development pathways such as following the green economy development principles (Stafford & Faccer, 2014).

## Methodology

The study used a qualitative methodology and semi-structured interviews to secure the perceptions of key informants (Cilliérs, Davis, & Bezuidenhout, 2014). Grounded Theory method was adopted because there is limited information on this phenomenon (greening) in Malawi (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The other reason for using this method was to construct a theory from the emerging themes from the interview data (Charmaz, 2006).

Respondents to this study were purposefully selected from industry regulating authorities from the public sector and the private sector (Charmaz, 1996). Two respondents were recruited from the Department of Tourism of Malawi. Peter was recruited because he works at the central office whilst Malaume works in the regional office. This sampling technique assisted to solicit a balanced opinion from the sector's mother department (Dey, 1999). Marumbo was recruited because he works in the city council whose jurisdiction amongst the many is to oversee development activities within the city (Merriam, 2009). This respondent provided insights on how the councils work with the hotel sector regarding environment management issues (Cilliérs, et al., 2014). Martin was recruited to provide information on the environmental management legal framework in the country because he works in the lead department on environmental management issues in the country (Marvasti, 2004). Whilst Henry was recruited to represent the views of the private sector (hotel sector) since this sector is dominated mostly by private investors (Bello, Banda, & Kamanga, 2017).

**Table 1. Profile of Respondents**

Organisation	Pseudonym	Duty Station	Responsibilities
Department of Tourism	Peter	Lilongwe	Directorial
Regional Tourism Office	Malume	Mzuzu	Inspections
City Council	Marumbo	Lilongwe	Inspections
Department of Environmental Affairs	Martin	Lilongwe	Directorial
Malawi Tourism Council	Henry	Lilongwe	Directorial

Data for this study were collected from September to December 2014. The study used interview guides comprised of semi-structured questions during key informant interview sessions (Charmaz, 1996; Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Required ethical protocols were observed throughout the study. Permission was thus sought from the city council and other government departments in order to be granted permission to collect data from their departments and territory (Dey, 1999). Letters and interview guides were sent to respondents one month in advance in order to allow participants to prepare thoroughly for the interviews (Charmaz, 2006). Before the interviews commenced respondents were briefed on the focus of the discussion and were further told of their rights to pull out of the interview session if they felt so (Dey, 1999). In addition, permission was sought to record the discussion for ease of transcription and followup questions.

These interviews were transcribed and each transcript was assigned a code and the respondents were given pseudonym accordingly to remain anonymous (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). A line by line analysis was done to identify the themes from the data (Charmaz, 1996).



Identical themes from each transcript were group together and compared with themes which were coming out from the other transcripts and those themes that represented a major issue were joined to form one major theme (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

## Results

The results of the study highlighted two major themes which are reported and discussed below:

1. Inappropriate governance of the development and operations of the hotel sector, and
2. Efforts to regulate the development and operations of the hotel sector

### ***Inappropriate governance of development and operations of the hotel sector***

Governance was a major theme that came out from the data. The results clearly indicated that there are challenges with the management of the growth of the hotel sector in Malawi. For instance, Peter (Personal Interview, October 2) said:

We do not have specific guidelines or policy direction on how the industry, the hotel industry could manage themselves in terms of environmental issues. But what we have is we have a law which was enacted in 1968 if not 1969 and reviewed in 2004, which set minimum requirements for one to operate Tourism Enterprise including a hotel. He needs to meet all other statutory requirements. That means that they have to comply with the Environmental Act, Land Management Act and any other laws in terms of how they dispose of their hotel daily refuse also in terms of how they build their structures. So we would say that by virtual of fulfilling that conditionality under different Acts which relate to environmental issues then they are also complying with the Tourism and Hotels Act.

This revelation is indicative that the parent department does not really enforce compliance with the law on environmental management in Malawi because of the lack of policy direction. This result supports the observation made by Krutwayshe and Bramwell (2010) and Rogerson and Sims (2012). This is a worrisome development because by assuming there is compliance without necessarily having in place an appropriate guiding tool on the same could mean the industry could develop and claim they complied. This observation is well supported by what Martin (Personal Interview, October 2) said:

The conduct of the industry ought to conform to that (Environmental Management Act) theoretically. However practically particularly here (Malawi), whether those two big hotels, they are both 4 stars is it? On some of the things (Environment Management) now if you look at performance on our side (Department of Environmental Affairs), we see that they are falling short. On the conservation aspects, we think they are falling short.

From this quotation, it is revealing that the industry is indeed left to grow as it wishes. Furthermore, this revelation may also suggest that as far as the Department of Environmental Affairs is concerned, they value numerous conservation issues which in their understanding ought to be considered by the hotel sector. In this regard, therefore, it could be assumed that the sector does not conserve natural resources. This revelation is in line with what Malume (Personal Interview, December 1) said:

Unfortunately the question of the environment I think we just do it in passing. But we are not strictly doing activities to do with the environment. What we look for when we are doing inspections are actually things to do with general cleanliness and standards in terms of the rooms, the reception, the public areas, the kitchen and the like.



This revelation by Malume correlates with what Peter indicated in the above quotation. Thus the parent department, in this case, has not put in place an appropriate institutional and legal framework that would ensure that the hotel sector develops in an environmentally friendly manner. This information provided by Malume would imply that the Department of Tourism is more interested in aspects that would enhance the profitability of the hotel whereby more customers would be enticed to regularly visit that facility because of the facility's cleanliness and hygienic condition. Henry (Personal Interview, October 2) also said: *"We do not have a specific policy, written down policy on that. I doubt really whether the Ministry (Department of Tourism) has, whom you are going to meet am sure, has a specific policy on that. I would have known because we serve on the Tourism and Hotels Board."* From these results, the understanding here is that there is no mechanism put in place to check if the sector is not following the capitalistic development tendencies as alluded to in the introductory section.

### ***Efforts to regulate the development and operations of the hotel sector***

The second major theme that emanated from the data indicated that there are efforts being pursued to promote sustainable environmental practices within the hotel sector. To this account Martin (Personal Interview, October 2) said:

We have seen that organizations like to be forced. We now want to introduce a scheme of recognition. Actually, by December 2014, we are beginning a go green campaign and in there, there is a scheme of recognizing green campaigners/green performers. We will use another criterion because if we were to use our technical criteria and everything being equal I do not think any of the hotels will be among those receiving such recognition. But anyway in the go green campaign there are specific aspects – efforts that we will consider maybe they will be able to catch up.

This result is a testimony that the regulating bodies are aware that the sector is developing in a capitalistic manner hence these efforts to change the industry's development pattern. Furthermore, the results are demonstrating that the current tools that are being used to focus on the hotel sector are inappropriate, thus the sector is neither controlled nor guided accordingly on environmental aspects. Marumbo (Personal Interview, October 2) also said: *"When we visit an organization we ask such organizations if they have an Environmental Management Policy in place. If we find out that they do not have such a policy in place we advise them to develop a policy and give them a time frame."* In the same vein, Henry indicated that:

Malawi Tourism Council always encourages its member to remember that for the sustainability of the tourism industry, we need to look after the environment otherwise we kill the same thing that keeps us going. Without a clean sustained environment, tourism will be affected and maybe even die or will be very seriously affected. People come to Malawi because of natural attractions; we are not like countries from the Middle East where they rely on manmade attractions, you know they build very attractive building, very expensive golf course and so to be able to attract visitors to their countries. For us, people come here because they know we have national parks, animals, culture, and historical inheritance and so on.

This response also is indicative that the private sector is aware of the need to practice environmental management if it is to develop sustainably. Furthermore, this quotation may also be suggesting that the paramount focus of the sector is on profit generation and that the environment should come in as an afterthought which is not in tandem with the greening principles alluded to in the literature review.

Peter (Personal Interview, October 2) also said:



We do have plans because now as I said, the whole World is going green. So we are promoting Sustainable initiatives or Environmental initiatives where you know, for example, use of you know, energy saving methods and you know water conservation and everything is paramount, it's becoming paramount and reduction of carbon footprint is indeed a big issue the whole World. At the moment we are looking at revising comprehensively the Tourism and Hotels Act, so within that revision that's when we are going to consider the environmental issues as now part and parcel of our minimum requirements for one to operate. That's the thinking within the ministry and within the Department.

This result indicates that the government knows there are gaps within the policing tool. However, this contradicts the earlier response from the same office that there is a provision within the current tool that provides for a requirement on environmental related issues. Again the result does not indicate whether the private sector would be engaged in the whole process or only partially involved if at all.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

As mentioned in the literature review, in developed countries the public sector and the private sector generally work together to come up with appropriate governance systems to promote sustainability practices. This collaborative effort has allowed the private sector to embrace green economic development pathways (see Ayuso, 2007; Burgos-Jiménez, et al., 2002). However, in developing countries as discussed in the literature, there are challenges to come up with this kind of arrangement (according to Smith & Leonard, 2018; Krutwaysho & Bramwell, 2010; Rogerson & Sims, 2012). The results of this study confirm that in Malawi there are also challenges because the public and private sector seem to be working in isolation. Furthermore, the results indicate that the hotel sector is not regulated and as such, the sector develops without adopting Sustainable Consumption and Production Practices (SCPPs) which has in a way negatively impacted the natural environment causing an ecological metabolic rift ( Middleton, 2013).

The most interesting finding was that the government and the private sector in Malawi have realised the importance of having an effective institutional and legal framework. The results indicate that there are efforts being pursued to remedy the challenge which existed in regulating the development of the hotel sector. This result is in line with what was discussed in the literature (see Carasuk, et al., 2016; Alvarez, 2014).

This paper contributes to the available knowledge of the challenges that occur in developing countries regarding sustainable environmental management. The observations made in this study reaffirm that most developing countries allow the tourism industry especially the accommodation sector to develop in a capitalistic way in order to attain economic development. This development pattern as can be seen in Figures 1 and 2 could have brought about environmental metabolic rift which has resulted in environmental related catastrophes that Malawi is experiencing currently, such as floods. These environmental related challenges are partly manmade because the available institutional and legal framework is not effective to monitor developments that are taking place in inter alia, the hotel sector and other supporting economic sectors.

Despite revelations made about the intended measures to make the industry environment-friendly there could possibly be non-compliance from the hotel sector as indicated by Martin. This is because there is limited consultation between the public and private sector in the whole process. As such these efforts could not yield the desired result and the sector would likely continue growing in a parasitic manner and bring about the more environmental metabolic rift, thus bringing more challenges to the society which is looking for economic development. Thus a need to engage the private sector in all the mentioned efforts is necessary and the only conceivable path to success.



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