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Conference Reports

2nd International Colloquium on Tourism and Leisure, Chiang Mai, Thailand 5-8th May 2008

Ray Boland and Brian Wheeler

Right from the off, the atmosphere at the conference was relaxed, friendly and supportive. Setting the proceedings in motion Erik Cohen's key-note "The Wild and Humanized: Animals in Thai Tourism" got the conference off to a splendid start. Drawing on the illuminating example of the fireflies of Amphawa, Cohen argued the ramifications of tourism development to be more complex than might appear at first sight. He then suggested that the drive toward 'quality' tourists in Thailand had led to the development of attractions such as the 'Night Safari' in Chiang Mai, where a special experience with little connection to the indigenous wildlife was being provided. Prompted by this, subsequent discussion explored the different expectations and demands of western as opposed to Thai and Chinese tourists with regard to animal captivity.

As it turned out, we were able to witness some of these differences first hand as a visit to the aforementioned 'safari' was one of the impromptu social whirls added to the programme. Here animals from around the world are presented in recreations of their natural habitats. We, like all visitors, were transported through these environments on a form of open shuttle 'train'with bright, intrusive spotlights employed to pick out the animals in the darkness. Presumably used to them, the animals did not appear fazed or upset by the penetrating lights. The spectacular, but rather incongruous, laser display and accompanying deafening music at the end of the tour also detracted somewhat from the 'natural' setting....but it was easy to see how visitors, if not the animals, found it entertaining.

Apart from the wonderfully enigmatic capybaras, for us the highlight of the night safari was undoubtedly the 'predator prowls' section. But even here it was not so

much the actual animals and scenarios on show but the delightful commentary that was the captivating factor. And this due primarily to the guide, while giving the commentary on this part of our tour, drawing specific attention to “two baby bears” – Ruby and Diamond – which were, as she so quaintly and disarmingly elaborated, frequently “very naughty”. We recognise that it could be considered patronising or worse to be delighted by this turn of phrase: but, surely, there is nothing negative about being engaged and charmed by such apparent innocence. As part of the country’s attractions, outside Bangkok airport are ‘The Land of Smiles’ tourism posters extolling the qualities of the Thai people. Similarly, inside the building a bank’s adverts again capitalise on national characteristics – namely grace, gentleness and generosity. Selling the soul of the country? Controversial in context, maybe: but nevertheless these are unequivocally qualities to admire.

Overall the conference was a rewarding, interesting and (crucially) horizon expanding event. There was an eclectic range of papers and speakers from Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Macau, Hong Kong, Turkey, Pakistan, Iran, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Egypt, India and Japan as well as the Anglo- Saxon countries. Very specialised conferences undoubtedly have their role to play but there is great pleasure in the eclectic. The chance then to hear speakers (from countries often not so heavily represented at international conferences) deliver papers on a range of subjects we knew little about was, indeed, suitably stimulating.



Conference Venue

(Photo: Mark W. Neal)

It always seems unfair, often arbitrary, to select individual paper highlights from all presentations especially when parallel streaming precludes absolute attendance. Nevertheless, Jayne Fenton Keane's 'The Poetics of Tourism: Seduction, Idealism and Recovery in the Construction of Commercial Space' covered both stimulating ground and had particular unconventional appeal. Flummoxed by numerous references to "luas", initially we were gripped by professional angst trying to imagine what kind of ethnological or anthropological phenomenon this word referred to; or which arcane area of discourse theory was being scrutinised. It was only on realising the word in question was actually 'lures' that sweet relief dawned.

Later, in conversation, it was also Ms Fenton Keane who perceptively noted that until recently tourists' footprints were frequently portrayed as soft inundations in the sand. But that such positive sunny images are being replaced by the darker notions of the tourist footprint set firmly in carbon. Worth going to the conference for this one observation alone. (On the plus side this development could herald the welcomed

demise of that platitudinous, nauseous mantra 'Take only photographs, leave only footprints')

Karl Ian Uy Cheng Chua's paper entitled "Travelling with your Fingertips: Japan's 'original point-and-speak phrasebook'" introduced us to new dimensions of Japanese tourism and also helped confirm a belief that the assumption many western tourists have that local people should speak some English is not only impolite, but also rather limiting. There are many more entertaining, fun and creative ways to communicate, as this paper showed. The schedule circulated before the conference included an enticing paper entitled 'Houellebecq as Sex Tourist'. Eagerly anticipating an analysis of the controversial French author our hopes - as is so often the way in life - were duly dashed. This time by that perennial conference hazard... the non- appearing presenter.

Particularly impressive was Erik Cohen's regular attendance at the paper sessions and the helpful, constructive comment he passed on PhD students' papers. All too often key-note speakers are there for the ride: detached from the actual conference proceedings, they give their presentations and disappear. Not in Professor Cohen's case: he was excellent value.

With the conference dinner as the centrepiece, a vibrant social agenda is usually regarded as critical to conference success. In this respect, the ICTL was something of an oddity in that there was, in fact, no conference dinner; and on the social front, at least initially, delegates were generally left to their own devices. This seemed something of an oversight, if not mistake. Rectifying the situation, two hastily arranged, but very enjoyable, field visits were pragmatically added to the programme. A sensible move. (And a lesson for next year, perhaps?)

The stated aim of the enthusiastic organisers was 'to provide a lively forum for academics and professionals to meet and exchange interesting ideas in an informal, interdisciplinary setting'. In this they were successful. The conference venue, the Novotel, and the location, Chiang Mai, both proved good choices, conducive to the conference philosophy. Internet reviews of the hotel were mixed, but we found it fine. (For us) very reasonably priced....rooms clean, airy and bright: restaurant good: staff

friendly, helpful and efficient - though the hotel did appear to have only one, very elusive, iron. And Chiang Mai as a city? Marvellous



Temple in Chiang Mai
(Photo: Author)



Chiang Mai Restaurant
(Photo: Author)



Bridge in Chiang Mai

(Photo: Author)

So, specialised academic conferences clearly have a place in the world but there should be more room for the open and generalised events such as this one. Dyer (2005) has an apposite quote from Nietzsche on this issue (but then again there is a telling quote from Nietzsche on most issues). He reminds us that Nietzsche was “profoundly hostile to those who ‘study and prowl around a single domain simply because it never occurs to them that other domains exist.” Dyer also reminds us that “...although we live in a time that sets great store by measuring progress (‘research’ in academic parlance) in precisely demarcated areas of knowledge, real advances are often made by people happy to muddle along with the splendidly vague job description advanced by Susan Sontag, whose ‘idea of a writer (was) someone interested in everything.’” (Just where that leaves a recent Australian television interviewee who basked in the gloriously flamboyant title of “freelance generalist” is another matter)

Nowadays, the promotion of inter-disciplinary perspectives is often encouraged, to the extent that it has become something of a cliché. But conferences such as this

provide ample opportunities for rewarding discoveries. They should be approached in much the same way as one does a walk through a welcoming, reasonably familiar garden..... enjoy the comfortable stroll, flourish in the familiar and yet always be open to the joys afforded by the new and the unexpected. Same again next year? Certainly hope so.

The 3rd Colloquium on Tourism and Leisure will be held in Chiang Mai, 4-7 May 2009. Further details available at www.ictlconference.com See you there.

Reference:

Dyer, G (2005) The Road Less Familiar, Guardian 08.10. 05 available from: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2005/oct/08/photography.film>

Ray Boland, Breda University of Applied Science and **Brian Wheeler**, University of Tasmania

Cruise Sector Growth - Exploring Opportunities and Challenges: The 1st International Cruise Conference

Bremerhaven, Germany 26 – 27 Sept 2008

**Philip Gibson, University of Plymouth and Alexis Papathanassis,
Bremerhaven University of Applied Sciences**

The first International Cruise Conference was held over two days in Bremerhaven Germany during September 2008. The conference attracted a broad range of interest from academics and industry professionals who were keen to engage in lively discussion about matters that are pertinent to today's burgeoning cruise industry. As such, this particular conference was an important event because, while cruise industry conferences occur for professional engagement and the isolated academic conference takes place with a cruise focus, it is still relatively rare to see a tailored cruise conference that sets out to bring academia and industry together for a common purpose. That this conference occurs now, and the intention to establish

such a gathering on an annual basis, is testament to the place occupied by the Cruise Industry as a highly visible and an extremely successful modern day business with a long term future.



The organiser Prof Alexis Papathanassis speaking with delegates

(Photo: The Author)

Delegates travelled from across Europe and the US to attend the conference. Cruise operators Princess Cruises, Cunard Line, Royal Caribbean, Oceania Cruises and Transocean Tours were well represented, as were travel specialists Expedia, crewing agents Connect Worldwide Recruiting, software specialist Fidelio Cruising and the UK's Merchant Navy Training Board. Academics from Universities in Germany, UK, Croatia and the US were represented on the podium.



Prof Lukovic engages with his audience

(Photo: The Author)

In relation to Human Resource management on Cruise ships, Brian Johnson the Director of Fleet Training and Employee Relations at Princess Cruises and Cunard Lines presented a detailed overview of their project to introduce Personnel and Training Managers to address changing organizational needs. Ben Wolber, from Oceania Cruises highlighted the importance for cruise operators to work with the University of Plymouth and the University of Bremerhaven so as to capitalize on HR opportunities. Daniela Fahr of Connect Worldwide recruiting emphasised the scale of the challenge in sourcing 32,000 new crew members over the next 3 years as an additional 41 new cruise ships are introduced. Prof Lukas from the University of Bremerhaven discussed the need for a more sophisticated approach to developing leadership practices in the face of a complex working environment and a more competitive recruitment field. Building on this Prof Milde focused on the future of the Filipino workforce for the cruise industry and showed her depth of understanding of this important labour market. Finally Philip Gibson of the University of Plymouth introduced the recently designed National Occupational Standards and qualification structure for Maritime Hospitality Management on behalf of the Merchant Navy Training Board.



Dr Lim responds to questions

(Photo: The Author)

A second theme that related to new trends and innovation provided Tom Fecke the General Manager (Germany and Switzerland) of Royal Caribbean to show how his company aims to maintain and accelerate growth. His discussion included an insight into their newest vessel the Oasis of the Seas which will carry up to 5,400 guests. Michael Kwag and Eungyu Lee from Boston University presented data concerning the Asian Cruise Industry. Alexander Moebius from consultants Seacon contrasted this with his update on the growth of the European Cruise Market. The emerging patterns became all the clearer when Prof Vogel of Bremerhaven University revealed the realities of pricing and the importance of revenue for cruise brands. Prof Papathanassis examined the issue of trust and electronic distribution systems for cruise brands. Dr Lim from the University of Plymouth proceeded to unravel the complexities that undermine price consistencies among global distribution systems. The topic was further examined when Dirk Ifsen of Expedia.de showed his company's model for developing cruise sales and Jose Lucas from Fidelio Cruises showcased developments in integrated cruise software. Finally Karsten Sohns and Michael Breitner introduced Data Mining and discussed its application for cruise companies.



Delegates picture
(Photo: The Author)

There were many other vital and relevant presentations including: that by Prof Willms from Merkur International University who's ongoing research into the power of attraction by the cruise ship at shipyards or when visiting cities and how that can be harnessed by tourism providers; Prof Vogel's use of game based learning for cruise management; Patsy Morgan's discussion relating to meeting the needs of specific passenger types, Janet McCutcheon's work on standardized rating systems for cruise ships; Werner Kalbfleisch's examination of medical services on cruise ship; and Prof Lukovic from the University of Dubrovnik who described the opportunities presented in terms of nostalgic tourism for historical and replica vessels.

The programme felt largely cohesive and the delegates were of one mind in praising the quality and content of the conference. Commenting afterwards, the organizer, Professor Alexis Papathanassis, said "The unexpectedly positive outcome of this event underlines the need for a more intense dialogue between cruise-sector professionals and academics. We hope that the 1st ICC has set the platform for facilitating such an exchange in the longer-term".

The second International Cruise Conference will be held between 18th and 20th February 2010. If you would like to know more please contact Dr Philip Gibson at the University of Plymouth (01752) 585617, email pgibson@plymouth.ac.uk

Conference website:

<http://www.pbs.plymouth.ac.uk/icc2/>

**The 2nd ITSA Biennial Conference Globalization, Tourism and Development:
Mega Events and Urban Tourism**

Shanghai, 6-9 November 2008

Graham Busby, University of Plymouth

Nihao. Professor Bihu (Tiger) Wu welcomed delegates to the Second International Tourism Studies Association conference. Presenters from Poland, Hungary, South Africa, Belgium, Taiwan, Canada, USA, Malaysia, Germany, New Zealand, Finland, UK (Sheffield Hallam, Greenwich, Plymouth, Hertfordshire and Canterbury Christ Church), Italy and Portugal were present besides those from China. Unfortunately, there was no South American presence – one of the goals of ITSA.

As with all conference reports, this one merely provides a ‘taster’ of the business conducted during the three days. Saturday morning keynote speaker Professor Mike Weed (Christchurch Canterbury) spoke to the title of ‘Leveraging sport mega events’; this was based on his research and evidenced through a number of his books on screen. Taking the cover of his book *Olympic Tourism* and its iconic landscape, from the Barcelona Olympics, Professor Weed emphasised how the link between sport, tourism and the Olympic Games is well-documented; he discussed the pre, during, and post-Olympics periods, all very pertinent in light of UK 2012. With his ‘Features of Sport and Tourism’ Powerpoint slide, the link was made to the first speaker in one of the following parallel sessions; Georgina Harris (University of Plymouth) presented a paper entitled *The New York City Marathon: The Social Impacts of a Mega Event* (Harris & Busby), documenting the resident (n=171) research undertaken at the 2007 marathon; in itself, what makes this research noteworthy is that runners were also interviewed and publication of those findings is awaited.

Anna Dłużewska (SWPR University, Warsaw), in a paper entitled ‘Mega Event on Permanence: Social Impact of Tourism in Dubai’, reported on qualitative research undertaken in 2004 and 2006. She argued that the scale of cultural and social dysfunctions of tourism is very low; yes, there was social frustration at the Hatta Oasis, as a result of tourist behaviour, but tourism there is on such a smaller scale than in Dubai; to be borne in mind is the ratio of indigenous inhabitants to short-term

workers, that of 5:95. With regard to business tourists, she observed that they do not infringe the cultural norms – to which it must be asked: is that surprising? Anna's results indicated that 'despite the common opinions, the planned development of tourism based mostly on mega events can limit an extent the social and cultural dysfunctions'.



A neon welcome at East China Normal University for the 2nd ITSA Conference

(Photo: The Author)

Ubalduino Couto (IFT, Macau) presented a paper entitled 'Catholic Processions: festivals that cause disturbance in the city – an exploratory study', based on Macau. It must be admitted that this reviewer, having visited Macau decades ago, had not realised just how densely populated the area is today – compressed into 29.2 square kilometres is a population of 538,100, the most densely populated area in the world, Couto advises. Two particular Catholic processions, occurring in February/March and May each year, are argued to be different to other types of events and, importantly, enhance the social capital of the destination. As Dino Couto observes "by celebrating these festivals with processions, the more 'intangible' aspect of Macau's heritage and Portuguese influence can be preserved". There is community pride and, significantly, this is probably the only city in China that openly celebrates Catholic festival processions. He emphasised that whilst social costs, such as

congestion, are temporary, the benefits are long-term, confirming the work of authors such as Getz, Arcodia & Whitford, and Derret.

From Liping Liu (University of Hawaii) and Edward Ruddell (University of Utah) came a paper with the lengthy title of 'Performing Place and Ethnic Role Identity within Ethnic Tourism – among the Miao of Dehang Village, Western Hunan, China'. Based on fieldwork in Dehang village, between April and late July 2007, Liu and Ruddell argue that ethnic minorities can acquire self-meaning by role-playing in tourism, in terms of both staged and everyday activities. Staged tourism performances of life in a real Miao village permit the individual to express their identity; indeed, as Liu commented, despite frustrations by central government, Miao intellectuals have organised rituals, written about Miao life and taught the younger generation to play *lusheng*, in other words, "behind their performative practices lie their aspirations for achieving self-esteem, cultural distinctiveness, continuity and change".

This brief report does not do justice to the sixty or so papers presented at East China Normal University, one of the country's key universities, a member of the prestigious '211' and '985' projects – China's best higher education institutions. This conference on mega-events was very apposite given the recent Beijing Olympics.

The 4th World Conference for Graduate Research in Tourism, Hospitality and Leisure – Antalya, Turkey, 22-27 April 2008

Graham Busby, University of Plymouth, UK

A well-subscribed conference uniting graduate and academic research papers took place over five days in April, at the Otium Hotel Zeynep, encompassing delegates from over eighty different institutions in thirty countries. Following the opening ceremony and guest speaker Professor Turgut Var, a panel comprising Alain Decrop (University of Namur, Belgium), Alan Fyall (Bournemouth University), Seyhmus Baloglu (University of Nevada-Las Vegas), Larry Dwyer (University of New South Wales) and Antonia Correia (University of Algarve) considered tourism and

hospitality postgraduate education. In light of the ongoing relevance of climate change, Larry Dwyer questioned how many degrees address such issues and that of risk management; the curriculum at UNSW does (actually so does the final year undergrad module Crisis and Disaster Management at the University of Plymouth). With regard to internationalising graduate tourism and hospitality education, it was considered important that this should not just mean recruiting international students – academic staff should attend international conferences and create international alliances between institutions.

As with most conference reports, this one can only hint at the range of topics – and expertise – illustrated; with parallel sessions in operation, the following are merely a sample. Çağil Hale Kayar and Nazmi Kozak (Anadolu University) considered the destination competitiveness of Turkey when compared with EU members; twenty-eight countries were clustered according to their competitiveness scores, resulting in a perceptual map of thirteen factors. One cluster, comprising Austria, Germany, Denmark, France, Finland, Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden and UK, possess superior performance with factors such as air infrastructure, ground transportation, health, and cultural/natural resources. Adding in secondary determinants, such as safety/security and regulatory aspects, further emphasises this particular cluster. However, Ireland, Spain, Cyprus, Portugal, Greece, Italy, Estonia, Malta, Slovenia and Luxemburg are to the fore, relative to other nations in the sample, because of their continuous attempts to outperform in terms of tourism infrastructure; it was concluded that these countries not only attract more private investment in tourism, they also undertake extensive destination marketing campaigns.



Conference reception desk at the Otium Hotel Zeynep, Belek, Antalya.

(Photo: Author)

Candan Yildirim, Ece İnan and Metin Teberler (Marmara University and Istanbul Technical University) reviewed Istanbul in light of it's designation as European Capital of Culture (ECOC) 2010. Not surprisingly, they suggest that there are multiple effects of the designation, particularly given that they consider cultural visitors spend three times as much as "regular tourists". Istanbul was said to have changed dramatically since the 1980s and ECOC 2010 is an opportunity to 'showcase' the city, including "unknown sides".

Chang Huh and Sung Hee Park (Michigan State University) made a statistical research paper interesting! Travel behaviour, over time, was investigated through analysis of the impact of age, time of travel and generational cohort. Explanatory determinants were also examined by use of multivariate modelling. In terms of outcomes, the authors argue that trip planning horizons have grown shorter because of the internet – and opportunities to book flights and accommodation much later; this specific study found that travellers began their planning around sixty days prior to departure and, therefore, the timing of tourism advertising programmes should be staggered. The data was collected by the Michigan Travel Market Survey, whereby four hundred telephone interviews were conducted, each month, in the households of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin and Ontario (despite the title of the

survey!). This is a longitudinal study because, over an eight year period, a total of 38,417 interviews were completed.



Front (landward) entrance of the Otium Hotel Zeynep.

(Photo: Author)

Esra Onat Calvert and Suzanne Murrmann (Virginia Polytechnic Institute, USA) questioned “How influential is social capital in alliance performance?” – a topic that is distinctly under-researched. This reviewer can recall asking a researcher to publish findings on UK tourism associations well over a decade ago – there are so many and yet little is known on just how effective they are. Deriving from Bourdieu’s concept, social capital is illustrated when individuals cooperate in groups; listening to Esra Onat Calvert, the work of Bramwell & Lane (2000) came to mind, in the form of their edited book on partnerships, but serious empirical research is truly overdue.

Larry Dwyer (University of New South Wales) and Peter Forsyth (Monash University) presented a thought-provoking paper on the impact of climate change policies on long-haul tourism. Given that this form of tourism is a key source of GGE (Greenhouse Gas Emissions), any policy designed to mitigate climate change will, clearly, have an impact – in Dwyer and Forsyth’s review – on Australia.



Dr Rong Huang and Dr Steve Butts (University of Plymouth) – a warm day at 09.00
(Photo: Author)

They argue that it is relatively easy to accommodate the desires of travellers who wish to be carbon-neutral although the perception of many that aviation is a key contributor is a much harder issue to address.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that Metin Kozak and his team coordinated a very professional conference. The five days flew by and all enjoyed the additional benefit of seeing Aspendos, Perge and Antalya.