

**SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT: ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND DEBATES,
25TH—28TH APRIL 2017, KATHMANDU, NEPAL**

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Conference Report

The Conference on Sustainable Tourism Development: Issues, Challenges and Debates, which took place on 25th—28th April 2017, in Kathmandu, Nepal, brought together academics, policy makers, politicians and practitioners to address a range of issues facing sustainable tourism development. Participants presented papers embracing theory and practice on a variety of multi-disciplinary themes. Presenters provided stimuli, which encouraged the audience to identify, discuss and debate various perspectives on the challenges, opportunities, susceptibilities, vulnerabilities, and remedial actions to ensure the future of sustainable tourism. This report highlights some of the themes and conclusions from the conference.

Conference attendees and presenters recognized that for sustainable tourism to flourish in the long term that practitioners and academics must move beyond the traditional paradigms of ecological and environmental sustainability to embracing concepts that cover the broader issues of sustainability planning such as destination development, marketing, policymaking, destination and enterprise management and education. Scholars recognized the need for small medium sized enterprises to improve operational efficiency and drive profitability. They acknowledged the need to embrace new technologies and the necessity for education that ensures the long-term sustainability of tourism enterprises. The value and importance of novel or unusual forms of tourism such as astro-tourism, philanthropic tourism and volunteer tourism was explicitly discussed at the conference. Keynote speaker, Professor Marina Novelli, articulated how tourism philanthropy can address the needs of those living in less privileged conditions around the world. This speech provoked much thought on how philanthropic motives can be used to develop tourism products that can address issues of inequality and bring about greater social justice for deprived communities. Keynote speaker, Professor Ghazali Musa demonstrated how auto-ethnography could be used to research tourist experiences of mountaineering in high altitude environments; and Christopher Barrett highlighted a new scientific approach to achieving sustainability through the development of sunlight degradable and edible bio plastics.

Dr Christina Koutra noted that the exertion of power by tour operator businesses in metropolitan countries for cheaper prices continues to threaten the sustainability of small accommodation businesses in peripheral and insular regions. They highlighted the reality that power differentials still exist within the tourism supply chain and that tourism benefits still accrue to those that do not own the tourism resources at the

destination. The conference brought about the sobering realization that peripheral and insular communities, mainly in developing countries, continue to bear the social and economic cost of tourism. Presenters reminded us that successful tourism development is dependent on maintaining a delicate balance between achieving social and cultural equality, economic growth and the protection of environments.

While the themes covered were timely and relevant, more in-depth discussions were needed to determine how solutions could be operationalized, particularly as it relates to the secondment of human and financial resources and the availability of grant-aid and other sources of financial support to fund sustainable tourism development projects. Much rhetoric and discourse revolved around the tourism industry and tourism businesses at the destination level with scholars using case studies as exemplars encompassing basic and applied research. This meant that broader macro and global issues did not factor on the agenda. A more holistic and futuristic approach that covers developmental and environmental issues integrated within a long-term global, political, social, cultural and economic context would benefit future agendas. The conference also did not proffer any new, radical or controversial views about sustainability matters. Perhaps in the future the more exogenous, global, social, political and economic dimensions could be explored further.

Although tourism is one of the principal economic activities on islands and an essential source of job opportunities, livelihood, and inclusive growth, topics related to this sector were notably missing from the conference. However, the conference did much to strengthen and build awareness of approaches to sustainable tourism in developing nations and to highlight best practices, strategies and options for sustained economic growth. It demonstrated the importance of knowledge exchange between academics, researchers, students and representatives from industry, government and non-governmental organizations. Its value in bringing about a transformation of human societies and attitudes towards a more sustainable tourism cannot be dismissed.

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