B.E.S.T. Education Network Think Tank IX: “The Importance of Values in Sustainable Tourism”

15th – 18th June 2009, Singapore

Conference Report

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Business Enterprises for Sustainable Travel Education Network held its ninth Think Tank on Sustainable Travel and Tourism in Singapore on the 15th to the 18th of June, 2009. The conference was held in conjunction with the School of Business at James Cook University in Singapore. Founded in 1998, BEST Education Network is an international consortium of educators committed to furthering the development and dissemination of knowledge and is dedicated to developing innovative sustainable travel and tourism practices that enhance and develop current industry, academic and traveller practices. A major focus of B.E.S.T is the dissemination of such knowledge and this is accomplished through the annual Think Tank which takes place over three to four days at various universities around the world. At the Think Tanks, research is presented, sustainable tourism topics are addressed and a research agenda and curriculum modules for use in undergraduate education are developed. Therefore, the success of B.E.S.T Think tanks arises not only from the high-quality academic papers that are presented, but importantly in providing the opportunity to work closely with others to share and create new knowledge in this field. The B.E.S.T Education Network is chaired by Dr Janne Liburd, Associate Professor from the University of Southern Denmark, and the executive committee is comprised of professors from undergraduate and graduate departments from around the world.

Before reporting on the Think Tank, this year BEST EN also hosted the first international symposium of Volunteering and Tourism, held at James Cook University the day before Think Tank IX commenced. Delegates were welcomed by Dr Deborah Edwards, University of Technology, Sydney and Dr Angela Benson from the University of Brighton, UK. The first key note was delivered by Professor Stephen Wearing, Associate Professor at the University of Technology, Sydney. Professor Wearing presented an engaging talk about the importance of experiences that allow tourists the opportunity to make a difference in volunteer tourism. Delegates then attended a roundtable paper presentation, of which there were 20 in total. Papers covered a range of current issues in volunteer tourism including: the motivations of volunteer tourists; volunteer value as volunteer capital; the potential of voluntourism in the meeting industry; opportunities for volunteer tourism; the social construction of the volunteer tourist identity; volunteer travel as meaningful travel for the authentic self; the practices of volunteer management at tourist attractions; volunteering and intercultural exchange; and the role of volunteers in SMEs. The second keynote was

delivered by Professor Robert Stebbins who introduced the concept of serious leisure and stimulated thinking for a future research framework. After a day of stimulating talks and discussion, delegates engaged in a panel discussion with Caroline Wells and Shane Beary, before engaging in a lively discussion to end a successful day.

Continuing on from the success of the symposium, Think Tank IX provided a platform for creative and innovative discussion and sharing of ideas related to the theme of . “The Importance of Values in Sustainable Tourism”. Discussions therefore centred on the importance of values in understanding and implementing more sustainable practices in tourism. It recognised that while cultural, social and historical values in many ways shape concerns that drive sustainability and such values influence how sustainability is interpreted and implemented in different destinations. To date, discussions have centred on such values in a Western context. Hosted in Singapore, Think Tank IX provided the opportunity to explore the diversity of cultural perspectives and values underpinning sustainable tourism practices. In total, there were 54 delegates from: Austria, Australia, Canada, China, Denmark, Germany, Japan, New Zealand, The Netherlands, Norway, Singapore, Thailand, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. The registration fee of approximately €330 included all conference documentation (including CD of conference papers and abstracts), all conference meals and refreshments. Conference accommodation was in the five-star Grand Copthorne Waterfront Hotel with free transportation to and from the conference venue at James Cook University campus. Both venues were extremely comfortable and provided excellent services both for professional conference requirements as well as entertainment and dining.

In order to achieve its goals, Think Tank IX drew upon a range of educators, researchers, consultant and practitioners from the tourism industry. Delegates were welcomed by Dr Janne Liburd, Chair of B.E.S.T Education Network Committee; Dr Gianna Moscardo, co-Chair of Think Tank IX; and Mr Noel Richards, Campus Dean of James Cook University. After a formal welcome from Dr Dale Anderson, Chief Executive Officer at James Cook University, the opening key note speech was delivered by Professor Pauline Sheldon, from the University of Hawaii. Professor Sheldon gave an engaging and insightful introduction to the work of the Tourism Education Futures Initiative (TEFI) and its aim to provide vision, knowledge and a

framework for tourism education programs to promote global citizenship and optimism for a better world. Professor Sheldon, who is also the President of the International Academy for the Study of Tourism, called for tourism education to be embedded within five sets of values, outlined as: stewardship, knowledge, professionalism, ethics and mutual respect. TEFI is now a program within the BEST Education Network and more information is available at: <http://www.tourismeducation.at>.

The opening address was followed by a series of plenary and paper sessions. In total, there were 28 paper presentations crossing a range of cutting edge issues under themes that covered: Economic, Social and Environmental Values; Values in Sustainable Tourism Education and Research; Sustainable Tourism Values and Tourist Behaviour; Values in Sustainable Tourism: Principles and Practice; Culture and Values in Sustainable Tourism, and Host Communities and Destinations.

The first parallel paper session explored issues of economic, social and environmental values in sustainable tourism. Speakers presented research on a range of topics including: the development of a knowledge platform on the value of parks for tourism; issues of tourism price competitiveness as a neglected value and perceived differences in the value of water between residents and second-home owners. In the concurrent session, papers were delivered on a range of topics on values in sustainable tourism education and research. In particular, presentations covered issues relating to: what sustainable tourism researchers value; the role of values in sustainable tourism education; valuing developments in tourism education in open innovation environments using the case of INNOTOUR, and revitalising community values through community-based education and research using the case of railway regeneration in Darlington, UK.

Session three encompassed a range of topics relating to sustainable tourism values and tourist behaviour including: the effects of tourist values and perceptions on recreation specialisation and destination marketing; intra- and inter-cultural trustworthiness and values between Chinese tourists; and, a postmodern constructivist research agenda for exploring environmental learning, values and travel experiences. Addressing issues of the principles and practices of values in sustainable tourism, the concurrent session

explored a range of issues including: the opportunities for creating superior value in sustainable tourism; the centrality of equity as a sustainable principle in labour justice and sustainable tourism; and sustainable tourism principles reflected in award-winning practices.

Session five explored the role of culture and values in sustainable tourism. Drawing upon a range of case studies, papers addressed issues related to: small family business values; ethical confusion in tourist photography, conflicts between indigenous culture and recreation in protected areas; cross-cultural interaction, capacity and sustainable tourism development in field-based education; and conflicts in the values of volunteer tourism. The final session, focused on the importance of values in host communities and destinations and included presentations addressing: quality of life as perceived by residents in tourism destinations; the use of social and political values to assess host community perceptions of tourism; the development of a relationship model and intermediary for community tourism management; the role of values in sustaining the hospitality labour market; questioning the sustainability of Courchevel; and finally, the challenge of personal values in achieving sustainability in business events; developing a sustainable tourism plan within sites of ancient cultural and historical significance using the example of the old city of Nan.

Throughout the remainder of the conference, several keynote and industry presentations were delivered. Mr John Gregory Conceicao, Director of Singapore Tourist Board, who addressed delegates by introducing Singapore Tourism Board's (STB) vision for Singapore as a "Global City". The STB vision positions values at its core as strategy emerges from a formula of trust, knowledge, connection and life and livability. Mr Wong Tuan also introduced the values that underpin the conservation and management of urban greenery and national heritage in Singapore. The founder and artistic director of the Sri Warisan Som Said Performing Arts Ltd, Mrs Puan Som Mohamed Said shared her experiences of showcasing and celebrating culture and heritage through performing arts and dance. Arguing that dance develops discipline and ethical behaviour she illustrated some of the opportunities tourism holds for increasing awareness and appreciation of Malay and Singaporean cultural roots and ethnic identities to create a sense of national belonging.

Given the focus of BEST EN Think Tanks as a fusion of key note presentations, research papers and the development of future research agenda and curriculum development, day three and four of Think Tank IX were dedicated to developing a research agenda for sustainable tourism curricula with the focus on the importance of values in sustainable tourism. This year, delegates engaged in a brainstorming process through the use of Zing technology and in less than 20 minutes delegates had identified over 100 issues related to the key issues underpinning values in sustainable tourism. As a result of the Zing interactivity, three main workshop themes were identified: the facilitation of think about and communicating values for sustainable tourism across different contexts; the understanding of the processes and intermediaries of change in sustainable tourism values; and, the research methods needed to research values in sustainable tourism development. Delegates self-selected into groups and as in previous years, the workshops provided a platform for sharing ideas and stimulated lively and creative discussions from which new and innovative research ideas emerged. The outcomes of each workshop were presented to the Think Tank and will be developed into interactive wikis on the BEST EN website (<http://www.besteducationnetwork.org>). This new initiative will allow both academics and practitioners worldwide to continue their collaborative efforts.

During the conference, delegates also experienced some of the sights and attractions of Singapore. On the evening of day one, delegates enjoyed a river boat cruise along the Singapore River towards Clarke Quay. The quay offers a mix of modern and traditional Singapore; a centre that has been renovated in order to celebrate both heritage and charm of the city's historical past of fishing and trading, alongside a colourful kaleidoscope of restaurants, bars and entertainment venues. On the evening of day two, delegates experienced the Night Safari at Singapore Zoo, while on day three delegates visited the Malay Heritage Precinct where they were able to see first-hand the interpretation and expression of Malay culture in a dance performance by some of Mrs Said's students. The heritage centre is part of the Singaporean Government initiative to support to encourage the various communities in Singapore to establish their own cultural heritage centres to showcase their heritage, culture and history, and thereby, preserving their own ethnic identities and values. All the tours provided during Think Tank IX were not only entertaining, but allowed delegates to

gain a deeper insight and understanding of the history and contemporary cultures of Singapore.

Finally, Think Tank IX provided the opportunity for highly productive and collaborative engagement between delegates. Realising the diversity of understanding and interpretation of values in sustainable tourism, it is now important that tourism educators, researchers and practitioners reflect upon the current value crisis and, as outlined by Professor Sheldon, engage actively in the promotion of values in education and also within the work place as we move to shape a more sustainable future. The organisers of Think Tank IX, particularly those from James Cook University of both Australia and Singapore, must be congratulated for organising another successful Think Tank that brought together delegates from all around the world. Conference proceedings are available online at: <http://www.besteducationnetwork.org>