

6th International Conference on Responsible Tourism in Destination

6ª Conferência Internacional sobre Turismo Responsável nos Destinos

6ª Conferencia Internacional sobre Destinos de Turismo Responsable

Harold Goodwin¹
Xavier Font²
Mariana Aldrigui³

Conference Report
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The 6th International Conference on Responsible Tourism in Destination (RTD6) was planned as a side event to the Rio Earth Summit (Rio+20), aiming to provide a platform for intergovernmental organizations, governments, donors, industry, NGOs and academics to discuss the progress which has been made towards a more sustainable tourism.

The conference was organized by a group of researchers⁴ from the University of São Paulo (USP), in partnership with the International Centre of Responsible Tourism (ICRT), and was co-chaired by Prof. Dr. Harold Goodwin, of Leeds Metropolitan University and the ICRT, and Prof. Dr. Eduardo Sanovicz, USP and former president of Brazilian Institute of Tourism (EMBRATUR).

Twenty years ago, the Earth Summit 1992 was focused on Environment and Development; today, the challenge is the same, but under the Green Growth concept. The Sao Paulo Conference has focused on themes of environment and development, providing opportunity to debate progress since the early 1990s, assessing tourism role in development, as well as the environmental, social and economic aspects related to tourism sustainability.

¹ Prof. Dr. Harold Goodwin, Leeds Metropolitan University and International Center of Responsible Tourism (ICRT). *E-mail*: harold@haroldgoodwin.info

² Prof. Dr. Xavier Font, Leeds Metropolitan University and ICRT *E-mail*: x.font@leedsmet.ac.uk

³ Prof. Dra., Universidade de São Paulo. *E-mail*: aldrigui@usp.br

⁴ "Tourism, Knowledge and Innovation" Research Group, composed of Prof. Dra. Cynthia Harumy Watanabe Corrêa, Prof. Dra. Karina Toledo Solha, Prof. Dr. Marcelo Vilela de Almeida e Prof. Dra. Mariana Aldrigui

There were 41 speakers and 183 delegates from 21 countries. By the close of the conference 73,324 people had been reached by Facebook and 16 million heard the live radio interviews from the conference on Monday afternoon.

Harold Goodwin defines Responsible Tourism as below:

Responsible Tourism is about taking responsibility, responding, taking action to address the social, economic and environmental issues of sustainability that arise in destinations. It is about doing something about it. It is about, making a difference.

It is in destinations that tourists and local communities interact in the local natural and socio-cultural environment. It is in destinations that tourism needs to be managed in order to minimise negative impacts and to maximise positive ones. The management of tourism in destinations cannot be reduced to the environmental agenda, it is as important to consider the economic and social issues that arise in destinations.

The first International Conference on Responsible Tourism in Destinations took place in Cape Town in August 2002 as a side event of the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development. South Africa was the first country to adopt an explicitly Responsible Tourism strategy, challenging the stakeholders to take responsibility for developing forms of tourism that would benefit the new South Africa.

The following conferences were held at Kerala, in 2008; Belize, 2009; Oman, 2010 and Alberta, 2011. For the sixth conference, the main issue was to assess and evaluate project results in the past 20 years. Four questions were addressed to the guest speakers:

- What are the advances of governments and international organizations towards sustainable development?
- How businesses can contribute to economic development by ensuring its sustainability?
- What are the reasons leading to success or failure of donor funded projects?
- What have we learned in 20 years on sustainable development in the communities?

The conference had 3 different panels each day, with an introduction to the panel theme followed by presentations and debates around the subject.

Dr. Eduardo Sanovicz and Dr. Harold Goodwin chaired the opening ceremony. The first one, USP researcher and former Embratur president, has presented the recent data on Brazilian Tourism, and Dr. Goodwin set the background and the importance of not only the conference, but the ongoing researches in universities around the world.

Dr. Goodwin also reinforced the main characteristics of Responsible Tourism: (1) minimises negative economic, environmental and social impacts, (2) generates greater economic benefits for local people and enhances the well-being of host communities, improves working conditions and access to industry, (3) involves local people in decisions that affect their lives and life chances, (4) makes positive contributions to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, to the

maintenance of world's diversity, (5) provides more enjoyable experiences for tourists through more meaningful connections with local people, and promote greater understanding of local cultural, social and environmental issues, (6) provides access for physically challenged people; (7) is culturally sensitive, engenders respect between tourists and hosts, and build local pride and confidence.

Eugenio Yunis, executive vice-president of FEDETUR Chile and former Director of Sustainable Tourism Development at the World Tourism Organization (1997-2007) and Director General of the Work Programme at the World Tourism Organization (2007-2010) presented "Learning from 20 years of tourism rhetoric and practice", summarizing the evolution of sustainable and responsible tourism concepts, and how tourism is integrated in public policies worldwide. He had stressed out the need of effective impact measures leading to broader research, redefining goals and strategies. Lack of government support, research and research grants to this particular subject, little community involvement and lack of appropriate education and training are the main reasons for the discrete evolution of sustainable practices in tourism.

Harold Goodwin started his presentation on "Ten Years of Responsible Tourism (2002-2012) - What lessons?" stating that "we go on vacation in other people's homes," and we should reassure that the community has some benefit. Dr. Goodwin reports 'ecotourism', 'carbon offsets' and 'green tourism' as failed strategies on sustainable tourism. For him, all kinds of tourism must be sustainable and responsible. Individuals are the key for a change, as their pride in taking part of sustainable practices will improve the quality of life, thus quality of local tourism experience. There is a need to spread information, educating the origin market, as well as working on destination.

Following these initial presentations, Dr. Ruschmann reported the case of Porto Belo island. While highlighting that sustainable tourism is a more expensive practice, she also detailed Brazilian progress through the implementation of sustainable tourism development plans.

Geoffrey Lipman, author of the recent published book 'Green Growth and Travelism' discussed the progress of governments and international organizations towards sustainable development. It is not a matter of greening the products only, but there is a need of change during all processes – from creation, investment, production, consumption – increasing the scale of renewable energy use. Jeanine Pires (former EMBRATUR president - Brazil), Heidi Keyser (ICRT - South Africa), Shahrazad Roohi (Abu Dhabi) and Wael Al Lawati (from Omran, Oman) presented their experiences at the government national level, detailing their programs, highlighting the importance of community involvement.

On the second day, Deidre Shurland (UNEP – France presented, via webconference, "Designing and Implementing Successful Sustainable Tourism Projects". For her experience, there are six key barriers to the effective ST implementation: 1) Policy frameworks (vision and purpose of action), 2) Stakeholder management (partnerships and shared risks), 3) Supply Chain Management (mitigating risk, mainstreaming sustainability), 4) Program and Project Portfolios (mandates, goal, relevance to the vision), 5) Measuring outcomes (indicators of success, progress

and performance) and 6) Transformative Learning (best cases, continuous improvement). Doing more with less should be the rule. Stakeholder management, as planned and purposeful engagement, is needed to make donor projects succeed.

Following this presentation, Dr. Vikneswaran Nair (Taylor's University-Malaysia) introduced responsible tourism in a rural perspective; Alexandre Garrido (Sextante Consulting – Brazil) brought the Sustainable Certification Process in Brazil, with cases of lodging small and medium enterprises adopting best practices. Both Prof. Arjun Singh (Michigan State University) and Julia King (Accor Brasil) addressed the 'role of the market', illustrating international hotel chain sustainable practices.

Another two excellent cases were the example of community empowerment through private sector engagement, from Condor Travel (Peru) and private sector commitment to conservation through philanthropy and commercial development, by Huilo-Huilo (Chile).

Fabrice Leclerq, formerly at the United Nations International Trade Centre, presented the 10 commandments for the success of sustainable tourism donor funded projects. They are related to donors, country/region stability, destination selection, value chains and products selection, sustainable market linkages, beneficiaries, counterparts/partners, project coordination and staff, expansion and replication and, finally, monitoring and evaluation. Lack of continuity, process not result focus, market gap and different values impact project success, says Helena Costa from University of Brasilia.

Xavier Font closes the second day talking about sustainable tourism marketing. Communicating why a company is environmental or social responsible is the goal, targeting well informed consumers who will understand messages such as "reusing your towels allow us to save money for social purposes".

Opening the third and last day, Ronald Sanabria (Rainforest Alliance) reinforced the need, in Latin America, of NGOs devoted to manage and implement sustainable tourism projects, protecting natural and cultural heritage.

He was followed by case presentations of the 'jungle route' in the Argentinian Misiones, which will soon be declared a national natural reserve; Afsaneh Ehsani and Nima Azari, from Iran, presented two different ecotourism approaches – turtle conservation as a tool for community involvement. Jans Hyaca, from Senamp (Peru) addressed the real tourism contribution to conservation.

Karen Basso (UnB-Brasil) described the recent advances on the Sustainable Tourism Observatory, and Donária Coelho and Gilson Borda discussed accessibility as a key issue on tourism development.

Finally, Dr. Kishore (Canada) presented strategies on Tourism Education, detailing her experience on youth engagement in festivals and other events, aiming to preserve and promote tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Dr. Aldrigui (USP –Brazil) introduced the Global Travel and Tourism Partnership, an educational program supported by the industry, implementing tourism curricula in eleven different countries.

During the conference, several good examples of actions and ideas from both private and public sectors were discussed. Although we are discussing sustainable tourism for at least 20 years, it will take some more years to get governments, industry, universities, NGOs and communities indeed committed to this cause.

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