

Conference Reports

TOOLS FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

The aim of this conference, organized by the RGS and convened by Dr Erlet Cater (University of Reading) was to examine recent initiatives in the planning and implementation of more sustainable tourism practice from both within and outside the industry. A range of speakers from tour and hotel operators, tourist boards, non-governmental organizations and consultancies, as well as from the academic world, attracted a large audience from a similar spread of backgrounds.

The morning session was chaired by Earl Jellicoe, President of the RGS, who introduced the day's proceedings by referring back to the requirements for sustainable tourism practice outlined by Geoffrey Lipman at the ecotourism conference convened at the Society the previous autumn. Shirley Eber, of Tourism Concern, and Editor of *Beyond the Green Horizon* (a study commissioned by the World Wide Fund for Nature UK), emphasized the need for incorporating socio-cultural and economic considerations as well as those of the environment to ensure true sustainability.

Noel Josephides, former Chairman of the Association of Independent Tour Operators, outlined various important principles that tour operators need to incorporate into their marketing strategies to meet the requirements of the increasing trends towards 'real holidays' as opposed to the standardized mass package product. He defined a 'real holiday' as one which met the clients' expectations whilst acting for the mutual financial advantage of the tour operator and host country, but leaving the environment unspoiled.

Dick Sisman, Chairman of Green Flag International, also examined the trend away from standardized tour packages towards more individual experiences. Using as an example the phenomenal growth in holidays linked to whale watching (accounting for four million domestic and international visitations in North America alone), he outlined his conviction that the days of the mega-operator are numbered and that the tourism industry will become increasingly fragmented. The emphasis must be on a working partnership, blending good environmental practice and profitable business.

In the past environmental considerations were missing from traditional accountancy procedures. One tool for 'green' accounting is that of environmental auditing, which involves monitoring a firm's activities to identify why, where and how its

processes and products interact with the environment. Professor Goodall, University of Reading, outlined the application of environmental auditing to the tourism industry and introduced various types of audit. Erlet Cater followed with an examination of how environmental auditing should help to identify the different costs and benefits to the various interests involved in tourism. She illustrated alternative scenarios with the use of examples to show how trade-offs have to be made.

The final paper of the morning session was given by Dagmar Woodward, General Manager of the Mayfair Intercontinental Hotel who described the major initiative undertaken by Inter-Continental Hotels in preparing an environmental operating manual. This was first issued to all hotels in the group in 1991, and several examples of its implementation were given. It was subsequently made available to all major hotel chains around the world, stimulating the industry to form practical guidelines under The International Hotels Environment Initiative.

One of the 'elder statesmen' of the hospitality industry, Lord Forte, chaired the afternoon session which examined sustainable tourism in different destinations. He stressed the importance of the tour and travel industry to the global economy, likening it to the significance of the steam engine to the Industrial Revolution. As first Chairman of the London Tourist Board, Lord Forte outlined how the early dismissive criticism of tourism as a 'candy floss' industry had been confounded.

Sheila Henwood, Director of Tourism for Jersey, outlined initiatives being taken by Jersey Tourism that will encourage good tourism practice to protect and enhance the island's natural and human resources. Jersey has been working with Green Flag International to achieve this aim. The emphasis is on integrating sustainable tourism practices with profitable business.

Professor Tony Travis, coordinator of the CEC-PHARE Tourism Programme in Poland, introduced the aims of the programme and various conservational and commercial activities that are being undertaken under its auspices. The implementation of a sustainable tourism programme in a poor Eastern European country is not without its constraints, and Professor Travis highlighted the need for realistic policies.

John Anfield, Director of Planning for the Peak National Park, England, gave an account of the

work of the Federation of National and Nature Parks in Europe, an international voluntary organization set up with the aim of disseminating information and experience on the management of protected areas between its members. He also described problems faced in the Peak National Park, the most visited in Europe, with 22 million visits a year, highlighting the pressures being placed on protected areas.

Turning to the experience of the less-developed nation, Martin Crookston, of Llewelyn Davies Planning, described the development of a sustainable tourism strategy for the historic town of Salt, in Jordan. Conservation of the historic attraction of the city is being combined with the need to earn valuable tourism revenue and ensure local participation. With the detente in the Middle East, integrated tourism circuits between Israel and Jordan are now an actuality.

The final paper of the day's proceedings appropriately focused on the Polar regions, amongst

the last havens of unspoiled natural environments in the world. Bernard Stonehouse and Kim Crosbie, of the Scott Polar Research Institute, presented a paper which reviewed the evolution of tourism to Arctic and Antarctic latitudes, and examined the prospects for sustainable tourism, given the increasing numbers of tourists to these destinations.

A brief, but lively discussion at the end of the day revealed the degree of interest and concern in the issue of sustainable tourism. Clearly, the requirement for sustainable practice must remain to the forefront of the tourism agenda. It is hoped that some of the papers presented at the conference will be published in a forthcoming issue of *The Geographical Journal*. Several of the papers from the previous year's conference on ecotourism have been incorporated into a book published as a joint venture between the Royal Geographical Society and John Wiley, publishers.

ERLET CATER

ENVIRONMENTAL MAPPING AND NATIONAL NEEDS

This one-day conference, held at the RGS on 24 November, 1993, began with the Chairman, Professor Paul Mather, emphasizing its limitations as being confined to examples from UK terrestrial thematic mapping. Such limitations were necessary to limit the conference to a single day and provide a focused agenda in the all-embracing and rapidly expanding realm of environmental mapping.

The first paper, by Dr Peter Cook, Director of the British Geological Survey, provided a broad picture of the range of mapping produced by the Survey in response to the strategic national needs. Dr Cook stressed the benefits of merging differing data from different resources to solve specific enquiries. This point was also discussed by Roger Moore of the Institute of Hydrology who bravely challenged the undue importance, as he saw it, of 'geography' in GIS. Location was but one attribute, he asserted, and one which was not necessarily more significant than time, for example.

Time was a significant element in the comparisons permitted by the Land Cover map of Great Britain, discussed by the final speaker of the morning, Robin Fuller of the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology. This satellite-based survey, when combined with ground truth from a detailed sample field survey allowed for measurement of land cover change.

After lunch, the perspective changed from general, country-wide resources to particular areas or projects. The two sessions were linked by Linda Davies, Kent County Council, where, in the context of improved communications to mainland Europe, the countryside was undergoing considerable change. A baseline countryside audit had become

an important tool for understanding the implications of this change.

Rob Atkinson, Friends of the Earth, taking up the latter point, asserted that it would be the environment that would suffer most from the lack of access to information which has already been collected, but which is not currently available on easy and affordable terms. In contrast, Anne Kemp, RSK Environment Ltd, emphasized the dynamic nature of the landscape and asked which landscape was it that was to be conserved – the actual landscape of 1993 or an idealized, but perhaps non-existent landscape from the 'golden days' of the mind's eye. These questions were brought together in a case study by Margaret Cruickshank of the environmental conflicts posed by peat cutting in Northern Ireland: an interesting study which demonstrated that environmental mapping provided information not only about environmental but also about socio-economic matters and that the question might often become or be perceived as environment versus people.

The final session was entitled 'the Strategic View' – a discussion which ranged over questions of cost, quality and needs. While it became clear that there were no easy answers, it also became obvious that the conference had allowed a most useful interchange of ideas and information and that all the 200-plus delegates who had attended, from local and national bodies and from commercial, governmental and educational organizations, had enjoyed a stimulating and useful day.

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