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Tourism 2004: State of the Art II

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Tourism 2004: State of the Art II

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In 1994, The Scottish Hotel School, University of Strathclyde, celebrated its 50th anniversary by hosting a Conference, *Tourism The State of the Art*. The publication arising from this conference was published by Wiley & Sons and consisted of 89 papers amounting to a massive volume of 867 pages. Unsurprisingly the content was variable in quality. Nevertheless the coverage was very comprehensive and with the benefit of hindsight it is clear that the content is a fair representation of the "state of the art" in the mid 1990s. In 2004, the University celebrated its 60th anniversary by hosting *Tourism The State of the Art II*. On this occasion the publication had less visual impact being confined to a CD version. However the content was expanded to include 200 double-blind refereed papers, reflective of the rapid expansion of research output in the field as well as the strong interest generated by the staging of the conference.

What were some of the differentiating features of the second conference? The Scientific Committee for the conference included representatives from all of the Universities in Scotland active in tourism thereby conveying a degree of collaboration amongst institutions. This to me was a welcome sign of maturity. The emphasis on postgraduate research was another emerging theme. Prior to the commencement of the main conference the University hosted a graduate student forum, which provided a platform for Strathclyde's growing number of doctoral candidates and a good networking opportunity for research students from elsewhere.

The first day of the conference was focused on industry related issues and included presentations by Scotland's Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport, and by the Chief Executive of the relevant NTO, Visit Scotland. These presentations provided an insight into trends within Scottish tourism from both a supply and demand and a policy perspective. The presence of the Minister was highly symbolic of the impact of devolution in the UK, since this has come about since the staging of the previous conference. During the lead up to the conference, the local newspapers were highlighting controversies surrounding the Minister, a reminder that along with devolved power comes accountability and responsibility. The conference provided a useful platform to consider some of the issues that arise when a former region ("Scotland") assumes some of the characteristics and responsibilities of a fully fledged and autonomous national tourism organization.

Presenting an industry perspective, Donal Dowds from BAA Scotland provided a useful insight into the role played by airports in developing Scotland as a tourism destination. He raised a number of challenges about the capacity of destinations located at the periphery to attract direct international air services. Dowds highlighted the instructive case of Emirates Airlines which now flies directly from Glasgow to the Middle East and then direct to Australia. This example was used to show how a destination can be made attractive to airlines through the preparation of a convincing business case by the relevant authorities. The connection between the University and Glasgow as an urban tourism destination was re-enforced by the contribution of Visiting Professor Eddie Friel, Chief Executive of The Greater Glasgow Tourist Board. The concept of "town and gown" is certainly very evident at the level of interaction between Universities and the local authorities. In the panel discussion involving both practitioners and academics which followed, Professor Kit Jenkins referred to the 'great divide' between academia and industry. Responding as a member of the audience Professor Chris Ryan questioned whether the gulf was as great as was implied and observed that in practice many strong relationships exist between universities and tourism authorities particularly at the local level. This debate had been evident during the conference 10 years earlier and will no doubt be continued into future conferences.

As a component of the industry day, a number of sessions were devoted to case studies. These included themes such as Impacts, Small Enterprises, Events and Tourist Experiences. The various cases provided a useful engagement between industry practice and academic interpretations. Various keynote speakers, including leading international scholars, were interspersed through the various concurrent sessions. As a former staff member and alumnus of Strathclyde University, the reviewer was asked to provide a summary to the conference at the end of the proceedings. Given the many parallel streams it was not possible to draw out particular highlights, but it was noted that most of the conferences sub-were identified to the equivalent headings 10 years previously. He observed that there was no dedicated segment on tourism in developing countries and that examples from the developing world were now interspersed in the programme under various other headings. The substantial number of participating Strathclyde PhD students from developing

countries and their active involvement suggested a high level of integration and perhaps signals a greater degree of maturity within the academic community. King did however note that developing country issues have a continuing need to be profiled at such conferences. He observed that the high proportion of international doctoral candidates both at Strathclyde and elsewhere, is symptomatic of the increasing internationalisation of education. He also observed the increasing proportion of delegates from the Asia-Pacific region and associated papers particularly on Chinese topics.

In addition to the academic programme, the conference contained a range of social events which provided delegates with an insight into Glasgow and the West of Scotland. Networking functions took place within the Scottish Hotel School, at the imposing City Chambers and involved a Ceilidh or Scottish celebration at a local hotel. Delegates also had the opportunity to visit the World Heritage site at New Lanark or Scotland's first National Park at Loch Lomond.

As had been the case at the TTRA Europe Conference held in Glasgow during 2003, this conference provided an interesting juxtaposition of internationalism and the strong identity of the Glasgow region. Delegates noted the higher prominence on social and cultural issues than is common at equivalent conferences in North America. Political trends including Scottish devolution, provided an interesting overtone and the expansion of doctoral research provided grounds for optimism about the future of tourism research. The conference was a genuine celebration of the longevity of the Scottish Hotel School and was a welcome opportunity to acknowledge achievements stretching back over a 60 year period.

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