

# Workshop Report: RSA research network on Tourism, Regional Development and Public Policy

## 2nd Workshop: Developing tourist destinations Aalborg, Denmark, 26-28 November 2008

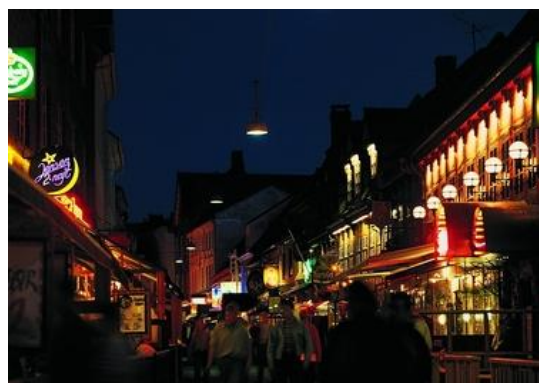
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The aim of the RSA research network on tourism, regional development and public policy is to examine tourism diversity from the perspective of regional development in order to identify current challenges and opportunities in a more systematic manner, and hence provide the basis for a more well-informed integration of tourism in regional development strategies and move beyond political short-termism and buzzword fascination. This aim is pursued through a series of workshops and publications, taking place in 2008-2009, starting in Izmir, Turkey, spring 2008, and the third meeting taking place in Warsaw, Poland, in September 2009. In between southern charm and metropolitan buzz, the second workshop took place in Aalborg, Denmark, where, shrouded in the darkness of northern November, 25 participants from all over Europe gather to discuss issues related to tourism and regional development.



*North Jutland in June, as seen by VisitNordjylland*



*North Jutland in November, as seen by workshop participants*

The research network has a very wide remit that covers many different dimensions of tourism that are central from a regional development perspective, such as

- place branding and territorial identity
- travel services, including the rise of the budget airline short-trip culture
- on-site services, including standardisation/specialisation in hotels, second homes and rural accommodation
- attraction development, including cultural (culinary, heritage, faith-based), event (sport, music), nature (sea-side resorts, mountain areas), and activity-based (health, sport) forms of tourism
- the role of tourism within regional development strategies and organisations
- tourism labour markets, competences and seasonality

Given the location of the second workshop in north-western Europe, particular attention was given at the Aalborg workshop to discussions about the development of tourist destinations which are *not* part of the package tour industry and the role of destination management organisations in bringing together local actors.



*Mike Danson discusses Gaelic tourism*



*Susanna Heldt Casselt talking about post-mining tourism*

The first plenary session set the tone right from the beginning, with contributions by Lars Enevold Petersen, the CEO of the regional tourism development body *VisitNordjylland*, and professor Mike Danson from the University of the West of Scotland. While Lars Enevold Petersen painted a cautiously optimistic picture of the possibilities of addressing the recent trend of stagnating visitor numbers through coordinated efforts to extend the season and work towards the goal of all-year tourism, Mike Danson highlighted the challenges faced by attempts to develop the Gaelic element of tourism in Glasgow, Scotland, which in many ways could be seen as a proto-typical new-model form of tourism based on communities of specialist interests. Key dilemmas in both presentations was the difficulties involved in mobilising diverse stakeholders, and, indeed, the extent to which further tourism development would be seen as socially acceptable by the communities potentially receiving additional visitors.

These themes recurred in the key-notes by Susanna Heldt Cassel, Högskolan Dalarna, Sweden, and Rhodri Thomas, Leeds Metropolitan University. Both speakers highlighted the difficulties involved in transforming post-industrial places, both in terms of creating an external brand that would be attractive for visitors, and with regard to persuading existing stakeholders – private, public, and civil society – that the past may become useful if creatively reinterpreted rather than simply preserved or ignored for the sake of local identity and reverence.

The final key-note was given by Anne-Mette Hjalager, Advance/1 and a major contributor the literature on innovation in tourism, and she brought the role of visitors into even sharper focus in her presentation on the role of user-driven innovation in relation to tourism destinations, developing a typology of the relationship between users (visitors) and producer (service providers) which focussed in particular on the prospects of developing interactive relationships with a smaller number of key users through community building.



*Anne-Kathrin Zschiegner on tourism leadership*



*Networking disguised as Danish-style Christmas lunch*

In between the keynotes, around 20 papers were given in two parallel workshop streams, presenting findings from case studies from across Europe from a wide variety of perspectives, ranging from economics, via policy studies and geography, to cultural studies, and addressing aspects of tourism development from Kent in the west to Poland and Estonia in the east, from North Jutland and Lapland in the north Germany and central Europe to Portugal in the south, and dealing with many different forms of tourism: coastal, rural, urban, cultural, nature-oriented...

Being together for two full days created a unique experience compared to larger conference, because everyone had the opportunity to talk repeatedly with everyone else in a pleasantly informal atmosphere, making the workshop a useful place for ongoing dialogues about key issues in tourism and regional development.

Hopefully this format will continue at the third workshop of the research network, and the organisers hope to meet both well-known and new colleagues with an interest in tourism, regional development and public policy in Warsaw in September 2009 – details about the event, including call for papers, can be found on the RSA website.