

# Conference report

## Tourism Outdoor Conference, Snowdonia, 14-15 October 2014

Albert Postma

Dr Albert Postma is Professor of Applied Sciences at the European Tourism Futures Institute, Stenden University, Leeuwarden, The Netherlands.

On 14 and 15 October 2014 Llanberis, Gwynedd (Snowdonia) in North Wales hosted the final conference and cross-border seminar of the Outdoor Tourism Project. Gwynedd is the home to Snowdonia National Park with Mt. Snowdon being the highest mountain in Wales and England and 300 km of coastline. The village of Llanberis where the conference was held, is located at the foot of Mt Snowdon. It is the gateway to some of the best climbing and hiking routes in the UK. On the first day of the event, which attracted some 70 attendees, a cross-border business seminar was held in order to bring together businesses from Wales and Ireland to share information and best practice and address the key topics involving the outdoor tourism sector. On the second day (about 150 attendees) the Tourism Outdoor Conference was offered to the project partners and the regions involved, to discuss and address key learning points from the project, and to address future issues and development opportunities for the outdoor tourism sector on a national and international level. In this report the main outcomes of the conference will be presented.

### The tourism outdoor project in North Wales

During the two days several speakers told about the Tourism Outdoor Project and its achievements. Back in 2011 the region of North Wales started to acknowledge the importance of tourism for the region. Then, the region attracted some nine million visitors per year, tourism provided for 11,400 jobs and it contributed an amount of £740 million to the local economy. In January 2012 the €1.9 million Ireland-Wales INTERREG-funded Outdoor Tourism Project took off and it ran till December 2014. The project generally aimed to maximise growth in outdoor activity tourism in the areas in Wales and Ireland on both sides of the Irish Sea. The project focused on four key areas: developing business and training; training opportunities for young local individuals; marketing and packaging the outdoor activities sector; and raising awareness of outdoor activities opportunities among local communities. Initially the focus was on fishing, yet subsequently it was broadened to outdoor tourism in order to increase leverage. The project has been successful. The region of North Wales is positioned as best outdoor activity destination in the UK and among the best in Europe, both with reference to the variety, and outstanding quality of its offer. For example, the region now offers world class events (auto cross and fishing), skiing facilities for people with all kinds of special needs, and the first wade location in the world. The former slate mining village of Blaenau Ffestiniog has successfully transformed itself into a key outdoor tourism destination through a partnership approach. The village has developed some spectacular outdoor activity attractions:

- Antur Stiniog Downhill cycle trail (<http://youtu.be/VM8tShcn-dY>);
- Zip World Titan, a network with over 8 km of ziplines over mountains, moors and quarries ([www.zipworld.co.uk/](http://www.zipworld.co.uk/)); and
- Bounce Below, three giant trampoline-like nets stretched between the walls of two vast chambers of a dis-used slate quarry in the heart of a mountain in a surrealistic setting, offering a surrealistic subterranean playground.

© Albert Postma. Published in the *Journal of Tourism Futures*. This article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) licence. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this article (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this licence may be seen at: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>

According to Lorna Easton (destination consultant at Blue Sail), North Wales has benchmarked itself with 17 other outdoor destinations across the world, such as: Fort William (“outdoor capital of the UK”); the Lake District (“adventure capital of the UK”); Queenstown New Zealand (“adventure capital of the world”); Isle of Wight (“the cycle paradise for everyone”); and river Wye (focus on river-based activities). This benchmarking made the region realise that it would be important to claim distinctive territory; to inspire visitors and to give them ideas, recommendations and top tips; to provide “snackable” content; to develop creative packages and special offers; to extend and enhance the experience; to provide practical information of how to book and where to stay; to make booking easy; and to organise events to support branding and to aspire.

### **Adventure and outdoor tourism in context**

Lorna Easton continued with putting adventure and outdoor tourism into a wider context. She asserted that extreme hard core has grown very fast during the past few decades. Activity holidays are becoming more mainstream. Currently 26 per cent of global travellers are estimated to take activity holidays. High adrenaline activities constitute a niche market, while “soft adventure” makes up 90 per cent of the market. Contemporary consumers want to have easy access, both to the actual experience and to information (“how to ...”). The most popular reasons for activity holidays are self-actualisation and satisfaction outside the pressures of daily life and making new friends. Activity holidays attract more women, more 50 + and more families. Many outdoor tourists belong to the category of “active baby boomers”. These do not feel happy when they are associated with the conventional images of elderly or youngsters. Lorna Easton thinks that for North Wales the markets of “tasters”, and “dabblers” offer the best prospects followed by “learners” and “enthusiasts”. Tasters are people trying out an outdoor activity for the first time or on a very occasional basis. Dabblers take part in outdoor activities occasionally as part of their leisure time or holiday. They are not regularly active but have some knowledge and skills. Key trends in the outdoor and general holiday market are: extreme/hard core; desire for easy; wilderness refined; box ticking; self-satisfaction and self-actualisation; showing off; active greys; slow travel; family bonding; and staycation (see also [www.outdoortourism.org/OT\\_Project\\_Marketing\\_Final.pdf](http://www.outdoortourism.org/OT_Project_Marketing_Final.pdf)).

### **Connecting with the customer**

Anna Varley Jones (Weber Shandwick North & Wales) shared her views about web psychology and the power of PR. She refereed to web psychology as the science of persuasive web sites and marketing, with the goal to engage the customer. Jones listed a few basic principles: first, audience insights (who are they and what are their interests). Second, human brains work in similar ways: reading the screen from left top via right top and left bottom to right bottom. Third, look for familiarity and patterns. Here social psychology is key as people look for validations by the group in order to make judgements. Fourth, simplicity is key. This refers to the instinctive part of the brain, nicely illustrated by the webpage of [www.visitlondon.co.uk](http://www.visitlondon.co.uk). Fifth, trust is important in the digital world, for example if it comes to hyperlinks with payment sites by means of social media buttons. Sixth, you need to surprise and delight. Here Jones refers to the fact that peak experiences will determine the final experience (peak-end rule). This can be stimulated by creating surprises, delight, personality (by pictures of persons, etc.). Seventh, be consistent with your brand and layout across the web site. Eighth, smart use of Fomo (the fear of missing out) for example, by announcing: “x people have booked during the last 24 hours”, or “we have only 2 left on our site”. Ninth, understanding rewards. Tenth, smart use of colours, as colours have meanings and associations and indicate emotions. Blue points at honest, trustful, calming, escape. Green at as expected, fresh. Red to action. Finally, inspire with images such as Ireland does on internet. In conclusion there are three golden rules: research (how do people use web sites, etc.); test (e.g. among customers, friends, families); and analyse and evolve. Anna Jones stated that PR is more effective than other kinds of adverts. PR makes people talk about you, it has the power to insight change, and to communicate Unique Selling Points. A major example is the job advert of the Australian island, which has often been copied since (see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Best\\_Job\\_In\\_The\\_World](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Best_Job_In_The_World)). To tap into the power of PR it is important

to monitor important trends and trend drivers. Important trends are: connaisseur nation, age of the ageless, inside-out authentic, nursery nostalgia, reboot camp, play nation, sublime tourism, infocraze, extreme immersive theatre, and playscapism.

Kate Doodson (Cosmic) gave a presentation on the future of digital marketing. She started to highlight the fragmented world of contemporary marketing, for example, because of the presence on many social media. Content marketing is on the rise as content is one of the top three reasons why people follow companies on social media. People use search engines like Google in their planning phase rather than using new media: 18 per cent in 2013, 24 per cent in 2014 (2014 Travellers road to decision report, June 2014): organic search and direct access are still the number 1 and 2 of traffic to web sites. Within the web searches there is an increase in search for “explainers”, for example about what to pack when?, which backpack is best?, what kit?, what is ...?, where to walk?, trails for families, how to guides, why does it rain?, etc. Figures show that web sites with content are much more effective than without, and companies with blogs generate two thirds more leads per month than non-blogging companies. Content might take different forms, such as photographs, videos, blogs, Pdf’s, infographics, or explainers online – and such explainers can be used many times again in different platforms. According to Kate Doodson video is the media of the future for sharing content. Currently 75 per cent of business people watch video once a week and two thirds of travellers watch travel related you tube activities (compared to one-half in 2013). So Kate Doodson recommends businesses to take their phone, to record a film, to edit it in the Youtube editor, to title it very well and to put in on their web site. Moreover, customer created video should be valued, for example by borrowing your customers a “gopro” camera, by offering free Wi-Fi of good quality, by organising video competitions between companies, or by embedding videos customers’ videos on businesses’ web sites and social media. Kate Doodson stressed the importance of researching and using “influencers” in the business domain as thought leadership sits at the pinnacle of content marketing. She mentioned internet stars as an example. These are people with millions of followers on internet or on YouTube that can be found by Googling or by searching for high Klout scores. Klout scores are numbers that range from 0 and 100 which reflect the influence of a person on internet. The penetration of mobile technology will increase the importance of video content. Doodson referred to for example: augmented reality (Wikitude app, Aurasma app), internet of things, wearable devices, the intelligent watch, and Geofencing. Wikitude allows you to find anything, like the best restaurant, the cheapest gas, names of mountains, etc. The Aurasma app will use a separate image to find a video. It has recently been used to make a video about the Berlin Wall. Geofencing is currently being explored by the tourism industry. The app uses the location of your cell phone to link you to I-beacons that inform you about promotions, provide you with a voucher code, etc.

Chris Daffy gave a keynote about customer care in business. He argued that crafting customer loyalty is one of the most important aspects of customer care. Daffy referred to a recent publication in *Harvard Business Review* (August 2014) which stated that customer experience drives business’ sales and membership, as loyal customers do more than what others do. For example: they recommend you to their potential customers, they pay more for the same things, they forgive you when things go wrong, they defend you when others attack, they provide you with honest feedback, they look for ways to spend more with you, etc. However, the attitude of customers has changed: what used to impress now won’t; what used to be OK now isn’t; what used to pass unnoticed, now doesn’t; what used to have impact, now hasn’t. Chris Daffy asserted that customers have become less tolerant, less forgiving, less patient, more demanding and more ready to complain (e.g. across internet). At the same time in most markets businesses haven’t kept up with these changes and are still giving the same service. Thus the gap between what customers expect and what business provide is widening in many markets, resulting in more complaints, more annoyance, etc. According to Chris Daffy it is simply not enough to create loyal customers and to exceed expectations. There is a need to create memorable experiences as only strong memories are likely to have an influence, either positive (wow) or negative (ouch). The nearer to the extremes of this scale between wow and ouch the more memorable experiences will be and the more they will affect future behaviour. Wow-experiences come at little or no costs, are quick and easy to do and are noticed and valued by colleagues and customers. The message is to try to create memory makers. Daffy gave a nice example of a

memory maker: a visitor attraction park would give children a small bag with “landing dust for Santa Claus” (sand) that they had to strew on the windowsill. These children would like to return every year for a new bag with landing dust ... Ouch-experiences should be searched and destroyed (Tripadvisor provides feedback for free!) and recovered by adding a wow-experience. Fixing an ouch-experience turns dissatisfaction into satisfaction, but as pain is one of the strongest emotions the memory of the pain will stay. This memory can only be overridden with a dazzling recovery that exceeds this emotion. So, “be the best at what matters most to customers you want to attract and keep”.

## Preparing for the future

Jo Knudsen (Marketing Britain Abroad) shared her views on how destinations could prepare for emerging markets. She started with identifying a few motivations of international travel: value for money, beautiful landscapes, fun and laughter, friendly and welcoming people, and unique holiday experiences. These motivations apply to international travellers from various countries. Jo Knudsen continues with illustrating the rising importance of emerging economies such as Brazil, Russia, India, China, United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia in international tourism. She asserted that travel agents play a significant role for tourists from countries such as GCC, India and Brazil (for visits to Britain 61, 73 and 57 per cent, respectively). Jo Knudsen discussed several general characteristics these markets that could help destinations to prepare for tourists from these countries. These characteristics are listed in Table I.

Dr Harold Goodwin (Manchester Metropolitan University) gave his view of how an outdoor tourism industry could develop in a sustainable way. He started his presentation with giving an overview of the historical development of the concept of sustainable development. He asserted that principally tourism is a polluting industry and he illustrates this with people queuing on Mount Snowdon to reach the top. To develop tourism in a sustainable way proper management is required. However, management is very complicated as the interests of the multiple stakeholders are not always in line. Harold Goodwin was quite sceptical about the progress that has been made with the sustainable development of tourism. He asserted that to make a difference it is a challenge to move from sustainable tourism to responsible tourism, and to use tourism to achieve sustainable development. To achieve this, partnership and collaboration is important along with schemes with which visitors can pay back. Harold Goodwin left the audience with the question: “Will Wales be used by tourism or will Wales use tourism?”

Dr Albert Postma (European Tourism Futures Institute at Stenden University) addressed the future of activity tourism. He started his presentation with addressing the future of tourism in

**Table I** Characteristics of selected emerging markets

| <i>GCC</i>   | <i>China</i>  | <i>India</i>   | <i>Brasil</i>   |
|--|---|--|---|
| Late to bed, late to rise                                      | Be aware and appreciate language barriers – put up welcome signs  | Expect Indian visitors to bargain with you           | They like to shop overseas so expect baggage (large and lots)                   |
| Family oriented needs, including hotel rooms and entertainment | Like accommodation with the familiar – slippers, pyjamas ...  | They like to be attended to quickly                  | Expect high levels of service – with the service charge included in the price   |
| May not take initiative in planning activities                 | Some smokers appreciate smoking rooms   | Tendency to frequently change their minds            | Will appreciate provision of Portuguese, staff and signage                      |
| Importance of Halal food – knowing where to find it            | Like central and convenient locations (including not being too far from reception in hotels)                | Expect a request for late checkout                   | Eating is a social activity with a lighter breakfast and more substantial lunch |
| English widely spoken and understood                           | Lower propensity to pay for goods and services with credit card while on holiday (China UnionPay terminals) | Will generally avoid use of credit cards for payment | Dinner is around 8.30-10.30   |
| Coffee preferred boiled rather than percolated or filtered     |   | Offer vegetarian catering                            | Higher than average propensity to pay with credit card when on holiday          |
|  |   | Tea is preferred over coffee                         |   |
|  |   | Dinner is usually late – not before 9p.m.            |   |

Source: Keynote by Jo Knudsen, Marketing Britain Abroad, at Outdoor Tourism Conference, 14/15 October 2014, Ilanberis

general. The World Tourism Organisation foresees that tourism will continue to rise during the decades to come, until an estimated number of arrivals of 1.8 billion in 2030. Even if conditions worsen, the future looks positive. Also for adventure travel. This segment within tourism is considered a significant growth market with, according to the Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA) an increase of international travellers in Europe and the USA from 29 per cent in 2009 to 42 per cent in 2012. The average trip spending shows a growth of 20 per cent per year, and the economic value of 65 per cent per year. To take a look into the future of activity tourism, Postma sketched the most important trends in active tourism, in tourism in general, and the societal megatrends that are relevant for tourism. Nevertheless Postma warned to rely too much on the extrapolation of trends, as forecasting has its limitations. Especially in today's globalised society which is characterised by hyper-connectivity and exponential developments, sudden events might have a major impact on tourism and might cause sudden disruption of the trends we relied on. Suppose if we would run out of oil?, if Scotland would have become independent?, if refugees from countries in war would populate our areas?, if Greece, Italy, Spain, Germany ... would have left the Eurozone?, if the temperatures in Europe would increase dramatically?, if our assumptions about mobile society were wrong? Foresight offers an alternative approach that does not start with the certainties of yesterday but with the uncertainties of tomorrow. Based on an analysis of the driving forces of change key uncertainties were identified that form the basis for the formulation of scenario's. These scenarios can be used to take a fresh look at the industry and to develop innovative products, services, business models, or strategies that would make the business or the destination more future proof. Postma ended his presentation with discussing two probable key uncertainties that affect the future of activity tourism: demand characteristic (either experience based or happiness based) and tourism flows (either regional/national or international/continental).

The conference reached a climax when Lowri Morgan took the floor. This ultra-endurance marathon runner impressed the audience by sharing her deepest feelings about the challenging Jungle Ultra Marathon in the Amazon Forest and the notoriously hard 350-mile non-stop footrace "6633 Ultra" in the Arctic. She talked about her drives, her suffering, and her will to move on when the body says stop.

### Corresponding author

Dr Albert Postma can be contacted at: [albert.postma@stenden.com](mailto:albert.postma@stenden.com)